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ISWARA DARSHAN

SWAMI
TAPOVAN MAHARAJ

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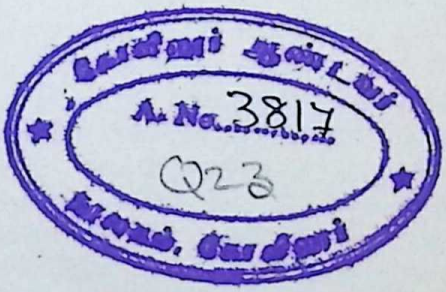
ISWARA DARSHAN

by

H. H. SRI SWAMI TAPOVANJI MAHARAJ



Publishers

(TAPOVAN GRANTHAVALI)

CHINMAYA PUBLICATIONS TRUST

175, RASAPPA CHETTY STREET

MADRAS-600 003

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First Edition 1969
Reprint 1979

Translated by
SRI T. N. KESAVA PILLAI
Perambavoor

PRINTED IN INDIA
AT HOE & CO., THE 'PREMIER' PRESS, MADRAS-600 001

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

It was perhaps the public approval that greeted my translation of HIMAGIRI VIHAR by Swami Thapovanomji Maharaj of Uttarkasi that induced his disciples, Swami Chinmayanandaji Maharaj and Swami Mahadevavanamji Maharaj to ask me translate Swamiji's spiritual autobiography, ISWARA DARSHAN or SRI THAPOVANA CHARITA, into English. My first reaction was to decline the task for more than one reason: the original is in Sanskrit—a language of which I know next to nothing; secondly, I know nothing of Vedanta which is the *elan vital* of Swamiji's life; thirdly, I am unacquainted with the technical terms generally used in Vedantic discussions. In spite of these conscious disqualifications I, at least, permitted myself to be persuaded into the attempt. What heartened me most in the endeavour was the gracious opinion expressed by Swami Thapovanamji Maharaj himself on going through the first few chapters of THE WANDERINGS IN THE HIMALAYAS. He then wrote to Swami Mahadevavanamji Maharaj:

"Went through the translation. It is lucid and charming. There is no doubt, the translator is a master in the use of the English language. It is good to publish it in the THYAGI; later it can be published in book form. The attempt of the translator to render the whole book into such beautiful English, in a style clear and captivating, is most opportune, noble, laudable and gratifying—This may be said again and again . . . . The remaining pages need not be sent over here. They may be published in the magazine after all necessary corrections, revision, etc. My blessings to the learned translator and Sri Krishna Pillai (now Swami Mahadevavanamji Maharaj)".

My first difficulty—lack of scholarship in the language of the original—was in a way overcome through the untiring efforts of Swami Mahadevavanamji himself. He succeeded in getting the book translated into Malayalam by Swami Mridanandaji Maharaj of the S. R. K. Asram, Vilangan. It is that fine book that enabled me to go forward with my own work. From this it will be clear that my version is the

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translation of a translation. I am fully conscious of the limitations of such work, but there was no alternative. All that I can say in self-defence is that I had tried to do my work as well as I can.

But for the affectionate proddings of Swami Chinmayanandaji Maharaj and Swami Mahadevavanamji Maharaj this work would not have been undertaken and even if undertaken, completed. Swami Madhuranandaji Maharaj of Vellimala, has been of invaluable help to me in explaining knotty passages, copying down Sanskrit passages into the manuscript, etc. Of course, none of my friends and helpers are responsible for the defects of my work.

The translator humbly thanks His Holiness Swami Vimalandaji Maharaj for the kind help in rendering some highly technical passages into English. He thanks also Dr. A. G. K. Warrier for similar assistance.

The life of Swami Thapovanamji Maharaj is a beacon light to all seekers of Truth. If my work helps anyone of them to understand his immortal and immortalising message, I shall deem my labours amply rewarded.

Perambavoor *Translator.*
Kerala
November 15, 1968

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PREFACE

The First Part of " Sree Thapovanacharita " was published last year. Since then Swamiji has completed his work and the Second Part is being brought out now. In Swamiji's own home-district, Kerala, Sahitya-Kusala Sri T. K. Krishna Menon, B.A., B.L. and Sri K. Krishnan Nair, Editor of the MANORAMA, have already blessed their compatriots with brief accounts of Swamiji's life. The Malayalees and Malayalam should deem themselves blessed even with those short sketches. As for persons like me, who know not the A.B.C. of Malayalam, the great good fortune of enjoying the elixir of that holy life has come within reach only just now and that too owing to the kindness of Swamiji himself. Our long and fervent prayers have at last been answered. They have borne fruit. We consider this as a stroke of good fortune—a matter of sincere gratification.

This book is not merely the biography of a great Mahatma whose mind is established in Brahman; it is, in addition, a treasure-house of spiritual and religious knowledge. That is why it is unique. The beauty of the style and such obvious features of literary excellence may be easily discovered and enjoyed by all learned readers of any literary sensibility and so I do not propose here to dwell upon them. It is true, in these days of wild propaganda, fair is made to look foul, and foul, fair, but even wrong-headed critics cannot altogether pervert the essential nature of things. True critics cannot but find out the truth sooner or later. If not today, at least to-morrow it will happen; it is bound to happen. I refrain from discussing the merits of the present work under the firm conviction that these will be found out and appreciated by discriminating and impartial critics in good time.

Essentially modest by nature Swamiji has not, in this autobiography, dealt at any length with the unique features of his life and his great qualities—his great knowledge-spiritual-and-worldly, his spirit of dispassion and renunciation, his cheerfulness, liberality, equanimity, natural grandeur, etc. Nor has he referred to the great faith of his devotees in him, their

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devotion to him, their great love and respect for him, Swamiji has refrained from making mention of these perhaps for fear of indulging in self praise. Even the incidents of his life that reflect his great qualities have been narrated only with embarrassing brevity. The readers have therefore to be satisfied with these accounts however brief.

This autobiography has a universal appeal since it introduces *inter alia* fine, delicate discussions on religion and philosophy, not in the technical, pedantic and vociferously contentious vein, characteristic of half-baked scholars, but in a lucid and independent style in accordance with direct experience and reason. It is true, ever since he embraced sanyasa he has been spending his time in the peaceful solitudes of the Himalayas, never once coming down to the lowlands, or adverting to worldly affairs, but ever devoting himself to *adhyatmic* studies, teaching, meditation and discourses. His mind was ever bent upon securing the vision of God and he has been concentrating himself upon penance following the path of "Nivrithi" (abstention from desire-prompted actions) but he never despises the path of "Pravirthi" (action) or disparages men who choose that path. He even encourages people engaged in work, pointing out that it is indispensable for the world's welfare. It is true, sanyasins follow "Nivrithi" but they are not to waste their lives in idleness by abandoning all work. Really a sanyasin has to work hard; doing much intellectual and mental work which it is all but impossible for worldly men to perform. In this sense his life also is one of action, not inaction. With such arguments Swamiji silences the noisy advocates of work and his words deserve the special attention of all those who have embraced a life of renunciation.

Nobody need be under the impression that in the Himalayas *siddhas* and *yogis* are as plentiful as black-berries—that they are wandering everywhere like herds of deer. On the face of the earth wherever one goes, one will find that men of divine qualities are rare indeed. In this book there are many such remarkable pieces of advice capable of dispelling the misapprehension of even learned men. Let intelligent readers read them for themselves, ponder over them and understand

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them. It is superfluous to make mention of them here, one by one.

About the exalted abodes of gods such as Alakapuri, Kailas, Sumeru and other Himalayan heights we have only read them in the Puranas. Swamiji has visited them in person though they are inaccessible to ordinary mortals. When readers go through his realistic, first hand accounts of the supermundane glories of these places, given without a touch of exaggeration, they will find wonderful new knowledge which will clear up their long-standing misapprehensions.

Everybody knows how unique Swamiji's life has been as a sanyasin. It is characterised by the spirit of total renunciation, above desires of all sorts and worldliness. He is firmly established in Brahman and the ineffable peace he enjoys remains uninterrupted. On entering sanyasa he took up his abode in a humble cottage at Rishikesh and led a life of austere penance. Before long he achieved supreme peace. At that time the writer of this preface had the good fortune to visit him. Day and night visitors from far and near were streaming into the cottage to get a darshan of Swamiji who loved solitude and peace. Wishing to escape from these distractions he went up into the mountains whenever he got an opportunity to do so. As years rolled on, his stay at Rishikesh grew shorter and shorter and less frequent. From his native place, Kerala, many distinguished men—scholars, millionaires, men of liberal disposition—who knew of his immaculate life as a brahmacharin, eagerly desired to see him and secure his blessings. In North India too sincere devotees were not wanting. Although the people of North India as well as South India were anxious to meet him and get his advice and blessings, Swamiji who had transcended all attachment and aversion preferred to spend his time on the hights of the Himalayas at Uttar Kasi, Gangotri, Gomukh, etc., and enjoy the elixir of peace.

In 1941 some of my friends and I had the good fortune to visit Gangotri and Gomukh. Our most powerful incentive was the desire to see Swamiji. Swamiji was then staying in an extensive deodar forest near Gomukh. When I saw him there in that peaceful and secluded place established in Brahman,

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my heart was plunged into wonder and reverence. It was then for the first time that I came to know something of his mode of life, all secluded and peaceful. How can such mahatmas who find their joy solely in a detached, composed and restrained life, stay in centres of humdrum existence which are altogether unsuited to their way of life, to their very genius, even if they are urged to do so by the sincerest of their devotees? How can they tolerate worldly activities and public contacts contrary to their samskara? How can they break their life of introspection, to be surrounded by other sadhus and devotees and wealthy, luxurious admirers? It was only natural if Swamiji who wished to pursue a life of "inaction", preferred a life in the Himalayan peaks beyond all worldly concerns and agitation.

1. When all the desires in the human mind are uprooted, man becomes immortal. Besides, he begins to experience the bliss of Brahman in this world itself.

2. For him who enjoys the Self, who is contented with Self, who finds his bliss in the Self, there is no bounden duty.

3. The happiness that a dispassionate Sanyasin living in solitude experiences is beyond the reach of the King of Kings or the god of gods.

In brief Swamiji is the perfect exemplar of such a way of life—a life in perfect accord with the injunctions of the Vedas and the Smritis.

Let me here record our sincere gratitude to Swamiji, the Prince among Sanyasins, shining with wisdom and penance, for raining down his mercy upon us in the form of this spiritual autobiography full of noble ideas and sentiments. Written in a charming and lucid style, this book will certainly help to engender faith in spiritual truths, and encourage men to lead a spiritual life. No doubt, this book will prove an ornament to the Sanskrit language itself.

H. H. Sri Rama Varma, Maharajah of Cochin, a King among scholars, well-known to the world as "Pareekshit Thampuran", has, with faith and devotion, described Swamiji as "the Flame of Spiritual Life in Kerala". Another great scholar Sri Kollengode Sri Gopalan Nair learned as well as pious, speaks most reverentially of Swamiji. The words of

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both these savants have been echoed and re-echoed by the wise and discriminating people of Kerala.

" Hearty salutations to the Holy feet of His Holiness Swami Thapovanamji Maharaj! Such men are ornaments to the holy land of Bharata. Having burnt up all actions originating in avidya (unwisdom), in the fire of spiritual knowledge, these great sanyasins pass their lives immersed in the joy of the Self. In the Himalayas there dwells such a holy mahatma putting out the fire of worldliness with the nectar of spiritual counsel. The fact that this living embodiment of peace is a son of Kerala is a matter of pride and gratification to every one of us."

Swamiji's life is a spiritual triumph. At the sight of that holy face, shining like the Full Moon, our hearts overflow with Divine joy. This is our humble prayer to thee! " O great sanyasin, may this petty little offering of ours, dedicated to you in the intoxication of our love and reverence meet with your gracious approval! May your merciful blessings be upon us! "

Bhavanagar
September 1, 1948

A servant to the Knowers of the Self
PANDIT VALLABHA RAMA SARMA

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WHAT THEY FELT

Vedanta Kesari, Madras

The present work in prose and verse is the story of the life and realisation of Shri Swami Tapovanam written in all objectivity by the Swami himself. We had occasion to notice in the Columns of our magazine the Swami's Saumya Kasisasthava and other beautiful works in Sanskrit. The book before us is written in flawless and charming verse and prose, in a style suited to the dignity of the subject-matter.

The Swami is not only a profound scholar in the Sastras and other scriptures but also a practical mystic who has spent several years of contemplation and reflection in the divine solitude of the Himalayas. We daresay all those who are interested in Sanskrit religious literature especially in the revival of the divine tongue in the present age will welcome this work both for the elevating matter it contains and the sweet manner in which it is presented.

Prabuddha Bharatha, Mayavati

The book describes the life of a great Malabar Sannyasi who spent several years in the Himalayas (in Garhwal) in great contemplation and austerity and has been able to help many seekers after truth. It is a welcome addition to Sanskrit religious literature.

The Hindu, Madras

The book is the first instalment of the auto-biography of Sri Swamiji Tapovanam. The author and subject of the book is a native of Kerala born in 1889 near Palghat in a Nair family, who underwent English and Sanskrit education, but from early days exhibited a yearning for renunciation and the leading of a spiritual life. Finding no guidance from mere Sanskrit scholars he sought Santhyananda Saraswathi a South Indian Swamiji settled at Bhavnagar. The subject of the account had a catholic mind which was responsive not only to the call of the spiritual company and the religious associations, but to the very kind mystic feeling from nature, art and literature. He tried the

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paths of public service through authorship of both Sanskrit and Malayalam journalism and lectures. He visited every part of this Country as a Sadhaka visiting all important shrines, meeting personalities possessing the spark of enlightenment and staying in centres of elevated activity like the Sabrmati Ashram, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Arya Samaj Gurukula, etc. The voyage of spirit set forth here makes very impressive reading unburdened by long compounds, free in use of verbs and free of any anxiety for ornamentation.

Sri Swami Tapovanam's Sanskrit prose is refreshing. The book enriches the stock of modern Sanskrit literature.

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SRI SWAMI TAPOVANAM

AN EMBODIMENT OF IDEAL SANNYASA

There is a significant saying that while sacred shrines and *Tirthas* purify the sanctify all mankind, more than this the sacred places and *Tirthas* are themselves sanctified and divinised by the holy men and saints who grace it with their passing footprints or prolonged presence. Those places and things that spiritualize and redeem man, derive their saving spiritual force from the *Jnanis* and Godmen that associate themselves with former. Such is the true worth and grandeur of *Tyagi Mahatmas* and seers. The blessed Lord Himself impressed this fact upon His great devotee Devarshi Narada, in the following beautiful and telling manner. When Narada one day visited Dwaraka, he found the Lord absorbed in deep meditation. Narada marvelled at the sight, for it was beyond his comprehension to imagine why or on what Lord Krishna would meditate. For, was not the Lord Himself the Supreme Object of man's meditation? Later on when questioned on this point by Narada, the Lord replied 'I was meditating upon the lotus feet of the saints and holy men'. Thus Lord sought to give some idea of the greatness of Saint-Mahatmas.

Sri Swami Tapovanamji Maharaj of Uttarkashi is a lofty example of just this type of most blessed souls. He is really a veritable living embodiment of the Ideal Sannyasa with all the supreme renunciation, rare saintliness, austerity, deep wisdom and divine dignity and compassion that is implied by such an ideal.

He is an ornament to the Fourth Ashrama. The Spirituality of this ancient land of Bharathavarsha took its refuge in the Sannyasins when Adharma became prevalent everywhere. The fourth Ashrama became, as it were the repository and safe fortress for the safeguarding of the spiritual heritage of Aryavarta. But when times and circumstances began to manifest their irresistible effects upon that institution also, then the Spirit of Sannyasa itself was in danger. The spirit of Sannyasa itself appears to have taken refuge in a handful of

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rare and exceptional souls who have been sublimely impervious to the influence of modernism, however strong and vicious it may be. Sri Swami Tapovanamji is one of these very few bright Stars that scintillate with all the undiminished grandeur of unsullied renunciation and wisdom on the firmament of Nivrithi life. In him the spirit of pure Sannyasa shines in its pristine glory.

Sannyasa was ingrained in Swami Tapovanamji from his very birth. Though born and brought up as the eldest son of a highly respectable and rich landlord and though he could well afford to live in a very affluent style, he shunned both riches and respect in his very boyhood, because divine Brahmanic qualities filled his veins, though the people of his caste in Kerala are noted for their Kshatriya spirit and Rajasic ruling nature. According to the history of Kerala, they were the rulers of their rich, beautiful and glorious country in ancient days. They are the descendants of a sect of Kshatriya warriors of Aryavartha who invaded, conquered and ruled the southern-most part of India. Now also they are called Kshatranayakas which means Kshatriya-rulers. They were the makers of the wonderful history of their own motherland. Owing to his extremely Sattwic and spiritual Samskara, Sri Swami Tapovanamji completely transcended such hereditary Rajasic Power-and-pleasure-seeking natures and all the attractions of the vanishing sensual life even in his very early age. His sense of value was something different.

He commenced his life with complete indifference towards worldly wealth and position. For he was born with the Sannyasa ideal foremost in his heart. He was rooted in the conviction that earthly glory was as mere straw before the grandeur of a life in the spirit. To this born-monk, Adhyatmic wealth alone was the real wealth.

In thus casting aside the life of ordinary wealth and enjoyment and taking to a life of ardent *Vairagya*, he has but fulfilled the glorious tradition of our land. Such has been the history of India's saints both in the North and in the South. There are innumerable examples like this in the rich spiritual history of India, all rich, prosperous, young and beloved persons

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taking to the life of the monk and doing Sadhana for self-realisation and self-bliss. The happiest and most glorious life is that of Sannyasi. Sri Sankara says in his " Dhanya-Ashtaka ".

Tyaktva Grihe Ratimadhogatihetubhutam
Atmecchayopanishadartharasam Pibantah;
Veetasprihaa Vishayabhogapade Viraktaa
*Dhanyascharanti vijaneshu vimukktasangah.**

" Leaving off all love for one's own house which is the basic cause of all our miserable downfall, induced by the thirst for Self-Knowledge, drinking the elixir of the Truth of the Upanishadic declarations, devoid of all desires at heart, with extreme dispassion for the host of the objects of enjoyment, fortunate souls wander in solitude giving up all company and attachment! "

Like all great men, together with the conviction he had also the rare courage to translate his conviction into an accomplished fact. The result was he deliberately threw off all prospects of a prosperous worldly career and took to the life of a recluse. He did not care to turn into material advantage the vast knowledge that he had acquired in Sanskrit and other languages, the deep study of the philosophy and also the great fame as a good writer and an eloquent orator. Instead, he became a Sannyasin. He decided to utlise his Vidya for the benefit and enlightenment of innumerable persons whose lives were benighted by the dense darkness of deep delusion's folds. Even this superhuman abandonment of a smooth, happy wordly life in the midst of " dear and near ones " is a child's play compared to the rigours that a saintly soul, accustomed to a rich and carefree mode of living, puts himself through on his adoption of the new Ashrama. Few can compare favourably with the Sakya Muni in their intensity of Vairagya, an extreme aversion to worldly objects, an abiding disgust for the pleasures which form, so to say, the very life-breath of a worldling, and an all-consuming thirst for Truth. This part of the Buddha's

* Verse in Sanskrit

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life (his renunciation and adoption of a life of seclusion and austerities) strikes awe into the very bone of one who "witnesses" it through the medium of cold print. No less impressed were the fellow-sadhus and the hundreds of householders who passed by his kutir, to see this Prince of Learning put himself through a course of Thapascharya. He proved only too true to his own name. His life during this period was as full of strenuous practices which breathe new life and vigour into the soul, as a Himalayan forest is of life-giving plants.

It is as strange as it is true that one who has a mastery of learning who had successfully and effectively passed through the two initial stages in Jnana Yoga Sadhana (Sravana and Manana) and who was eminently suited to pass on to the third (Nididhyasana or silent meditation on the Truths) which would almost instantly lead the aspirant into that luminous region of Truth and Immortality, should adopt the measures that any ordinary aspirant of the other system (Rajya Yoga or Bhakti Marga) would have in order to clear his Buddhi of the dross and make it sharp and subtle enough to grasp the Truth which is extremely subtle. To a Jnani of the type of Sri Tapovanji. Truth shines forth in all its splendour with the least effort on his part; it is as clear to him as an *Amalaka*-fruit on the palm of one's own hand. At this stage it is hardly necessary for him to practise any austerities. What can be gained by these practices which are intended to achieve what he has by birth? Such an intellect and such learning are given only to the select few who have passed through the lower stages of Tapascharya in their previous incarnations. Yet, Swami Tapovanam did all this in order to set an example to fresh recruits to this path and to warn them against the pitfall of deluding themselves with the perilous presumption that they too have performed Tapas in "their previous life" and that they are fit to be initiated into the Truth or Kaivalya. This page of his book of life further points to the supreme necessity of adopting the Synthetic Yoga which alone is suited to the present age. The ancients have laid out for us various methods for our adoption in our search for Truth; and we have, if we wish quick and sure attainment of perfection, to assimilate all that is best in the various Systems.

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This way we shall also ensure the homogeneous development of ourselves, and develop a breadth of vision which would not merely tolerate but appreciate the other methods of realisation.

Swami Tapovanam set before himself the ideal portrayed in the Gita by the Lord. He embodied within himself all the virtues enumerated in the Seventeenth Chapter as constituting the three forms of tapas—bodily, verbal and mental. An erudite scholar that he was, he withal restrained his Vach-Indryia and sublimated the yearning to pour himself out and shed the light of learning that filled his heart on one and all who came in contact with him. Unostentatiously he would remain in his Kutir contemplating again on the Truth which he had already long meditated upon and realised. Silently and within himself he would put everyone of the Hindu philosophical theories that he had learned so far to the test of actual realisation. In the evening he would pour out dozes of the rarest spiritual nectar to a select band of aspirants who would listen to him spell bound; for, every word that flowed from his lips then had not only the supreme authority of the Vedas, but had passed through the test of his own realisation. These sublime thoughts would, as they proceeded direct from his heart, take deep root in the listeners in whom they would invariably produce a complete reorientation.

Food and other creature comforts were a matter in which the Swami would take very little interest during this period. When hundreds of admirers would only have been too glad to provide for him the life of a princely Saint, he would insist on his personally going to the Kshetra for holding up his own hand in all humility for a meagre Bhiksha of a few *roties* and *daal*! Surely, had he sought honour, name and fame, would he not have remained in his old wordly surroundings where boys of the Princely class, and sons of millionaires would have sat at his feet to learn? He had realised the hollowness of popularity and shunned it, in spite of the fact that this relegated aspect of Maya had fondly sought his company!

Any one who had the good fortune to watch him during this part of his life would not have failed to notice that all the

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time he was anxious to be vigilant lest he should pass from Tweedledom to Tweedledee by getting back all that he renounced, though in another form, as it often happens with less wary souls. He was an aspirant of the *jnani*-type extolled by Sri Krishna as belonging to the highest class of His devotees. He was, every moment of his life, devoted to the discrimination and realisation of Spiritual Essence. With an austere and serene mind always contemplating upon his goal, he would detect any intruder into his realm of Bliss immediately on appearance and show him the exit! No wonder he made the Path smooth for himself—a Path acknowledged by one and all as the most thorny and most perilous—and achieved success in his pursuit with a rapidity which would have astounded even the ancients.

Thus he is an anchorite, whose ornament of austerity shines with the added lustre of brilliant intellect and a mastery over the difficult Sanskrit and Vedic lore. Of such it is said, "If the monk is the lordly elephant among men, a truly learned monk is a tusker, with the tusks adorned with the rich covering of pure gold studded with gems". He is, therefore, a most precious asset and an honour to the Sadhu Sannyasin class. Such exceptional Sannyasins as Swami Tapovanamji are a glory to this land with its ancient ideals of renunciation and Cosmic Service. They are a treasure to the entire humanity.

True to the classic tradition of rigid Sannyasa, Swamiji has taken himself to the forest fastness of the Upper Himalayas and for very many years past he has taken his abode in sacred Uttarkashi. He shuns the plains with all its garish materialism, its intense worldly bustle and petty concerns of earthly profit and pleasure. He seeks at times the deeper solitudes of the higher regions of icy Gangotri and Gomukhi.

To him the Himalayas are the native home, and seclusion amidst its towering peaks in his very life breath, as it were. He likes immensely the towering ranges, the dense deep seclusion of the Himalayan mountain peaks and its forests. He feels inspired by its sublime scenery and highly elevated by the serene peace of the Himalayan atmosphere. He himself has written, at the request of his Kerala admirers, a very beautiful

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book named "Himagiri Vihar" in his mother-tongue, Malayalam*, describing those wonderful wanderings and secluded Tapascharya on the Himalayan peaks and in shrines, including his trip to the sacred Mount Kailasa, twice. This work is narrations of elevating experiences, and reveals his deep thoughts on religious and philosophical secrets; and has been very much appreciated by men of learning. He is a great *Anubhava-Gyani* and is established in the Consciousness of the Supreme Self. Thus everywhere he turns and in all things he sees, the colourful Himalayan flora and fauna, the mountain streams and the cataracts, the glaciers and the snow peaks, he beholds the One Indivisible Supreme Essence alone. Thus he is ever immersed in the Supreme. He dwells there, a sage of deep Wisdom rooted in Brahman. Sree Swami Tapovanamji is one, as the famous Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad says, "who is attached to the Supreme Soul, who has detached from the non-Self, who has no desire whatsoever", and again, "who is an abode of tranquillity, self-control, purity, truth, contentment, straight forwardness, renunciation and egolessness", and also "who knows the true import of the Vedas, has given fearlessness to all creatures". All this Sri Swami Tapovanamji is and to him may be rightly applied the declaration of the same Upanishad, "Seeing that peaceful sage the celestial beings are attracted towards him. Because he does not have any corporal sign, he is fit to attain the state of *Kaivalya Mukti*".

His Life and personality are indeed most precious and invaluable, for they form a lofty example of what true Vedanta and true sannyasa have to be. They demonstrate the great secret of the relationship between Vedanta and Sannyasa. Sannyasa and Vedanta go hand in hand. One does not become complete without the other. Wherever there is real Sannyasa, there is practical Vedanta wherever there is practical Vedanta there must be Sannyasa of the highest type. Sannyasa without Vedanta or Para Bhakti becomes a mockery and a vanity-Vedanta without Sannyasa becomes mere dry intellectualism.

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* CHINMAYA PUBLICATION TRUST has published a translation of it as "WANDERINGS IN THE HIMALAYAS."

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Sannyasa without Vedanta remains as empty void and does not serve its purpose. Even so, Vedanta without Sannyasa becomes an impregnable, essenceless rock and does not serve its purpose. Vedanta cannot be grasped without emptying the ego through Sannyasa, and Sannyasa becomes a waste without getting at the Supreme Ideal through Vedanta. Sannyasa empties the individual of the ego and the negative phenomena and Vedanta fill it with the positive Truth and the Supreme Reality. When in one Sannyasa and Vedanta melt into one, there crops up a sage of Supreme Wisdom. Verily Sri Swami Tapovanamji has achieved such a state to a unique degree. He is an admirable combination of highest Vedanta Anubhava in the strictest observance of the laws of Nivritti and the Sannyasa Dharma. Therefore, his towering personality is an eye-opener and an exemplary Guide and Light to all seekers and Sannyasins. He is a challenge to as well as a timely saviour of the misguided, self-styled Vedantins with all their irresponsible eccentricities due to erroneous notions of Sannyasa and Vedanta.

Sri Swami Tapovanamji is a Brahma-Gyani. He is a veritable ocean of knowledge, an embodiment of Vedanta. Of countless Sannyasi-mahatmas dwelling in those regions, Swami Tapovanamji is the Crest-Gem. What the Dhruva Nakshatra is to the Stellar constellation, Swami Tapovanamji is among the Mahatmas in those upper Himalayan regions. Uttarkashi receives its lustre from his presence there. He imparts an added grandeur and holiness to that holy place. Its name has become synonymous with his. To the vast majority Uttarkashi means Sri Swami Tapovanamji. The Mahatmas there sit at his feet and drink the highest knowledge of the Vedanta that rains from his lips. They crowd before his Kutir and vie with one another for a close seat beside him during the informal Upadeshas. They all thirst for his Satsanga. No person passes through Uttarkashi without having the Darshan of and paying his homage to Sri Swami Tapovanamji. Even the highest of officials, the most learned of scholars sit at his lotus feet to learn Vedanta. His mastery of the difficult Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and Gita is astounding. Deep study and deeper meditation upon them

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have revealed their inmost truths to him. There is hardly anything he does not know of the Prasthanatraya. Upon rare occasions when he graces Rishikesh with his presence, he stops at a Parnakuti built upon a little hillock overlooking the Ganges in the Tehri-Grahwal State. His needs here are eagerly looked after by a loving admirer, who holds a high position in the Civil Service Department of the U.P. Government. Here too visitors and Mahatmas crowd to have his Darshan and to listen to his words of Wisdom. They pay homage to him in a worshipful attitude full of reverence. But Swami Tapovanamji sits serene and unaffected by it all. The true living Vedanti that he is, censure and adoration are the same to him. He is quite above these. True to the scriptural dictum, he always remains happy " whether he is worshipped or censured, whether he is praised or beaten ". He ever remains the same simple, affable, smiling sannyasin.

His exemplary character is brightened by shining realism. With all his Vedantic realisation, he realises the true value and force of practical example in the Vyavaharic field. His life reveals, therefore, true adherence to the minutest principles of Sannyasa. Even though he has innumerable devotees ready to lay their wealth at his feet and to look to him smallest comfort, yet the Swamiji has stuck to the Sannyasa life. He always prefers Madhukarbhiksha, for his food. Special offerings and rich eatables laid at his feet by visitors and devotees, he distributes to those around him, while he himself partakes of ordinary daily food. Though long past the stage of youth, yet he has trained himself to a hard life. He seldom wears footwear. The rough rocky ground and the mountainous tracts he traverses without hesitation every year. During summer he leaves Uttarkashi and goes to Gangotri on foot. Recently while at Gangotri he climbed some surrounding peaks near Gomukh, which a strong and robust Brahmachari who was then serving him found it quite impossible to attempt. The morning bath of the icy cold Ganges, this sage would never miss even a day throughout the year. A long evening walk in the Himalayan solitudes is a favourite item in his routine. He has marvellous self-reliance, Titiksha and he is a Sannyasi in every inch of him.

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It is an inspiring and purifying sight to see this great sage in his flowing ochre-coloured robes, staff and Kamandal in hand, bareheaded and barefooted, with Brahmic radiance shining upon his countenance.

One who has realized the absolute vanity of the world knows that the wealth of wealth is in the Atman and kicks aside without hesitation the paltry pelf of this earth, for he is convinced as the Narayanopanishad says that "not by works, not by progeny, not by wealth, but by renunciation alone is Immortality attained—Na Karmana na prajaya dhanena tyagenaike amaratwamanasuh". Also "Amritatwasya tu Naashaastri Vitteneti" as Yajnavalkya said to Maitreyi, *i.e.*, there is no hope of immortality through wealth. His learned mind has long ago discerned the absolute truth and propriety of the declaration in the Brihadaranyakopanishad that says, "desiring for the state of the Self one should renounce. Established in Brahman one attains Immortality". In the full vigour of his youth and prosperity, this brilliant scholar obeyed the call of all scriptures towards the Nivritti path. In his renouncing all earthly riches, Sri Swami Tapovanamji has enriched the Adhyatmic world by his Vedantic realization and he has presented in his person a great jewel to the Fourth Order in modern India.

His name is happily one that is most significant and most apt to him. He is indeed a Tapovanam, a veritable forest of austerity and penance. He has lived a life of intense Tapas for several years in the region of the Himalayas. Austerity and penance adorn this unique combination of Vedanta and Sannyasa even as the twin Makarakundalas adorn the divine ears of Lord Vishnu. A few years back when he wrote his beautiful and inspiring "Sri Saumya Kasisha Stotram" at North Benares he performed a rigorous Anushtan for 41 days during which he had the spontaneous outpouring of the divine verse.

He is verily Tapovanam, but not wild Vanam or Jungle grown with rough growth of dry austerity and cynical seclusion. He is rather an Upavanam full of fragrance of the flowering of Vedanta and filled with the fruits of his mature realisation.

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It is an Upavanam wherein countless bees in the form of seekers, sadhaks and sannyasins crowd to drink of the honey of true wisdom. Simultaneously with his great Vedantic experience, he is yet mellow with Para Bhakti. He is a Bhakta-gyani. He never divorces bhakti from Gyana. His Sanskrit books "Saumya Kasisha Stotram", "Badareesa Stotram" and others are all best examples of this. He always emphasises that Abheda Bhakti is conducive to the attainment of Gyana. Thus he combines in himself all the highest elements of Adhyatmic Life and the Nevritti marga.

During a visit to Ananda Kutir he was filled with immense bliss to witness the devout worship of Viswanatha and Murli Manohar at the Mandir. He was thrilled to hear the chanting of the Vedic Mantras and the Vedokta Pushpanjali. After finishing Parikrama, his face wreathed in joyous smiles. He smilingly spoke to the Brahmachari doing the worship and expressed his keen appreciation and great happiness at the devout conduct of the divine puja. Being no dry Vedantin, he may therefore be rightly likened to an Upavanam full of blossoms and fruits. No doubt, no seeker can go to him but will return with his spiritual hunger fully appeased. It may truly be said that Swami Tapovanam is a divine Upavanam.

It is said that compared to the treasure of Realisation even the position of Indra and Brahma is as mere straw. Even to show a wish for that is petty. When such is the case, to run after mere transitory things of this little earth is the pettiest of ambitions, "Better aim at a lion and miss it, than hunt a jackal and kill it"—the ancients have said. This great Tyagi-Mahatma did something more rather than aim at a lion; he himself became the grand King of the forest. Swami Tapovanam is indeed a Vedantic lion, a Vedanta Kesari, dwelling in majesty in his own regions of the great Himalayan range, whose very atmosphere is permeated with the spirit of Vedantic realization attained by past sages.

The value of such a versatile life and personality of modern India may well be imagined. It will be a sure beacon light that throws a flood of illumination upon what an ideal synthetic realisation is. It will help to rescue seekers from be bog of

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dry Vedantism, lop-sidedness and laxity in the observance of Sannyasa Dharma. His unique and valuable experiences Sai Tapovanamji is giving to the world in his antobiography "Iswar Darshan," for with all his love of solitude, yet his love for humanity is equally great. The fruits of his prolonged life of Sadhana in seclusion and his rich inner life of realization, he wishes to bestow upon all for their benefit and upliftment. It contains the most valuable records of his experiences and is a treasure that is to be imbibed fully by one and all. Even as Father Himalaya is perennially giving to the world his snowy treasure in the form of the life-giving Ganga, Sri Swami Tapovanamji has given his life's experiences in this written Ganga of his autobiography. May all drink of its waters and be filled with wisdom! May you all attain the Divine Life in the Atman and be established in the Supreme Brahmic Consciousness! All glory to Swami Tapovanamji who through his life and his life-sketch reveals to you the secret to this attainment!!

Ananda Kutir
Rishikesh
November 5, 1947

SWAMI SIVANANDA
Founder-President
DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

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H. H. SRI SWAMY TAPOVANJI MAHARAJ

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THE VISION OF GOD
OR
THE LIFE OF SWAMI THAPOVANAM

PART I

CHAPTER 1

There is one God who is the ultimate cause, responsible for the creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe. Without Him there could be no universe. There cannot be effect without cause. Can a barren woman bring forth a child? How can this world, with its method of creation beautiful beyond the conception of the human mind, be the haphazard product of inert matter, matter inert like a piece of stone? So we should believe in a God at whose bidding the air strives and the sun, moon and the stars shine. He cannot but be, who is present in everything and shines through all things. It may be, you do not see the powerful king in person yet, you cannot but recognise his presence when you see his authority operating all around you. Similarly, though we do not see God with our own eyes we can believe in His presence because we find His power in operation all over the universe. Is God corporeal or incorporeal? If He has a body, He must be an individual like any one of us. If He hasn't, He can not be credited with the creation of the Universe. Such doubts may assail the mind of the perverted; but the good, pure in mind and rich in faith fully believe that there is God and that He shines everywhere. In directly and indirectly determining the presence of God the supreme evidence is thus the pure and alert mind of the good. Their minds cannot be happy without believing in the existence of an Omnipotent and Omniscient Father of the Universe. All objects great and small, the little grass and the tiny flowers as well as the mighty sun, the planets and the stars all proclaim the presence and the glory of God through the Vedas, the Brahmasutra etc.

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Alas, alas! The materialistic philosophy of ancient *charvakas* and modern scientists is opposed to true knowledge. Varied arguments have conclusively proved it to be erroneous. Any further attempt to prove its error is altogether unnecessary and uncalled for and therefore I desist from it. If there is a creator to whom we owe our worldly pleasure as well as our ultimate salvation, how can we forget Him? Him, who saves all that love Him, all of us must worship in the proper way with work, with love, with meditation or true knowledge. The wise who realise through thought that God alone is real and all else is unreal can not neglect Him who is the embodiment of Bliss or desire to enjoy wordly pleasures which ultimately produce only satiation and sorrow, for the Siren of Desire can not lure them. Every man, therefore, ought to throw himself on the mercy of God who is the embodiment of happiness, abandoning all desire for the enjoyment of worldly pleasure. Man cannot get Him or reject Him even if he so desires, because He abides in all living beings and at all times as a luminous presence. So, one can realise Him only in the cave of one's mind and nowhere else. There can be only one God because He is 'spirit' without qualities or attachment. It is illogical to posit several 'spirits'. Only objects possessing qualities and attachment can be diversified by space and time. So to predicate plurality of God who is One without qualities or attachment is clearly absurd. God is Brahman—the one spirit that shines continually through all the multifarious objects. By realising Him man becomes birthless and deathless. This direct perception of God is the supreme object of human life. It is the supreme bliss, the supreme goal. The man who has acquired good tendencies by desireless action in the course of numerous lives, at last reaches the supreme goal through the blessings of God and of good people. Such a man is blessed. Whoever seeks to know God with form or without it, is blessed. Should I then say how blessed is the man who has actually perceived Him? Here I am going to set down briefly the life of a Sanyasin who was in this way blessed with the perception of God. Early in his life he detached himself from all worldly objects—He passed through life, like a man

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walking over a razor's edge, making his way along the rugged terrain of worldly existence, never once swerving from the strict principles of monality. As from his childhood he was engrossed, by the good tendencies inherited from previous lives, in the pursuit of Truth, he developed the *Satwik* qualities like *Sama* (control of mind) and *dama* (control of body) etc., to a remarkable extent. Above all, he obtained all that is to be obtained by the vision of God. Having fulfilled the purpose of life and identified himself with Him, he now lives with supreme contentment in the Himalayas. His beautiful life, so saturated with spirituality and so sweet to the ear, passed in the solitudes of the Himalayas, remains a closed book to all outsiders. I am therefore attempting here to narrate briefly the story of those spiritual adventures known to me alone so that it may satisfy the irrepressible curiosity of friends and arouse in the seekers after Truth a desire to travel along the path of Self-realization, and also afford the joy of the Soul.

The wise ones have said:

"तज्जीवितं जीवितमाहुरार्या यदीशपादार्पितमीशनिष्ठम् ।
न जीवितं जीवितमर्पितं यद्विनश्वरार्थाय विनष्ठमेतत् ।।"

(That life alone is life which is devoted to God and is centred on Him. That which is given to the pursuit of ephemeral objects is no life at all, it is as good as lost.)

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Alas, alas! The materialistic philosophy of ancient *charvakas* and modern scientists is opposed to true knowledge. Varied arguments have conclusively proved it to be erroneous. Any further attempt to prove its error is altogether unnecessary and uncalled for and therefore I desist from it. If there is a creator to whom we owe our worldly pleasure as well as our ultimate salvation, how can we forget Him? Him, who saves all that love Him, all of us must worship in the proper way with work, with love, with meditation or true knowledge. The wise who realise through thought that God alone is real and all else is unreal can not neglect Him who is the embodiment of Bliss or desire to enjoy wordly pleasures which ultimately produce only satiation and sorrow, for the Siren of Desire can not lure them. Every man, therefore, ought to throw himself on the mercy of God who is the embodiment of happiness, abandoning all desire for the enjoyment of worldly pleasure. Man cannot get Him or reject Him even if he so desires, because He abides in all living beings and at all times as a luminous presence. So, one can realise Him only in the cave of one's mind and nowhere else. There can be only one God because He is 'spirit' without qualities or attachment. It is illogical to posit several 'spirits'. Only objects possessing qualities and attachment can be diversified by space and time. So to predicate plurality of God who is One without qualities or attachment is clearly absurd. God is Brahman—the one spirit that shines continually through all the multifarious objects. By realising Him man becomes birthless and deathless. This direct perception of God is the supreme object of human life. It is the supreme bliss, the supreme goal. The man who has acquired good tendencies by desireless action in the course of numerous lives, at last reaches the supreme goal through the blessings of God and of good people. Such a man is blessed. Whoever seeks to know God with form or without it, is blessed. Should I then say how blessed is the man who has actually perceived Him? Here I am going to set down briefly the life of a Sanyasin who was in this way blessed with the perception of God. Early in his life he detached himself from all worldly objects—He passed through life, like a man

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CHAPTER 2

Kerala, white with her fame and dark with her perennial forests, lies to the south of Bharat, beautiful like the stage upon which the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity holds her divine dance. The land is graced by the presence of Lord Krishna at Guruvayoor, Sri Ramachandra at Thiruvilwamalai and Sri Padmanabha at Thiruvananthapuram. The invincible world-teacher Sri Sankara, prince among religious mendicants, who wrote learned commentaries upon Brahmasutra, the Upanishads and the Bhagavatgeetha, and His Highness Sri Kulasekhara-perumal, really a King among the devotees of God, were just two among the children of Mother Kerala. There were several others of almost equal eminence. It was in this blessed Kerala, in a small village near Palghat, that Swami Thapovanam was born in 1886 A.D. Old superstitions and hateful practices still lingered in the district and polluted its atmosphere but side by side with them existed a strain of deep faith in God. The child was born as a result of years of devout prayer. Its parents were distinguished by the Satwik qualities like modesty, mercy, and liberality, rather rare outside the Brahmanic fold. They were scrupulously clean in their life and conscientious in the performance of their household duties. Naturally they occupied an honourable position in society. The mother was called Balamba and father Achuthan. They belonged to the class of Kshatra-nayaks. There was something of the grandeur of the great ocean about them. They named their son "Subramonia". As he grew up day by day, he filled the hearts of his parents with joy even as Brahma Vidya fills with bliss the hearts of good people, practising sadhanas with pure hearts. Sri Achuthan Nair possessed both human and divine qualities in abundance. He was without a touch of egotism. He was a gentleman through and through, well trained and modest, honouring everybody and honoured by everybody. Pleased with the birth of his son he bestowed costly gifts upon Brahmins and the needy. In his eagerness to know the child's future he engaged famous astrologers to draw up his horoscope. In the horoscope of the boy, born under the constellation of Revati,

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on Suklapaksha Ekadasi day in the month of Margascrsha (Vrichigom November-December) there were several signs of extraordinary prosperity like the Kesariyoga coupled with Kemadruma Yoga, indicative of extreme poverty. How to reconcile them? It looked puzzling to the wisemen. According to one set of indications, Subramonya could have no married life at all. Certain signs suggested the acquisition of great knowledge and devotion as well as great fame. It is no wonder if the conflicting signs in the horoscope baffled the proud astrologers. How could those money-loving wiseacres read the inscrutable decrees of Providence? Is there any one in the world who can foresee the future accurately? Who can possess such omniscience? Can a bird fly beyond its pitch?

For the Hindus the Sukla Paksha Ekadasi day in the month of Margaseersha is a sacred day on account of the birth of the Celestial Song (the Bhagavad Geetha). It is called Geethajayanthi. It was on that auspicious day that the child was born. The birth indicated that in the future the child would soar up to the great height of spirituality, for such happy births on such auspicious days are rare indeed.

In time, the child was introduced to the alphabet of the mother tongue, Malayalam. He picked up the letters with wonderful alacrity. Having mastered the alphabet he began to learn the hymns to Ganapathi, Siva, Krishna, Rama and other gods by heart. It was a pleasant exercise for him everyday to recite the hymns again and again to memorise them. He used to sink into deep thought as he listened to the stotras describing the forms of various gods and goddesses.

To ape others and to quarrel are habits common to ordinary children and monkeys. Subramonya never betrayed such weaknesses. By nature he was firm and in the performance of duties he never relaxed. He was careless about food. Even as a child he loved to spend his time in solitude. He was fond of visiting holy temples and worshipping gods. He felt deep delight in meeting holymen. It was therefore his custom to visit temples in the company of relatives and worship the images with tears in his eyes and horripilation all over his body. Whenever he got an opportunity to do so, he felt as if the purpose

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of his life had been fulfilled.

To pursue objects of one's love is a quality of the mind. Those who can not discriminate between good and bad, driven by the tendencies inherited from previous lives, engage themselves in whatever action good or bad that fascinates them and disengage themselves from it, according to their whims and fancies. Accordingly, this boy too found his delight not only in worshipping at holy temples but also in quietly meditating upon the wonders of God's play in creation, preservation and destruction of the Universe. In season and out of season he plied his parents and other elders with questions on the mystery of creation etc., and felt delighted when he received appropriate answers for them. At such moments he literally forgot even hunger and thirst.

Besides, with great devotion he set up a beautiful piece of stone as Sivalinga for daily worship in one of the rooms of his father's house. With the assistance of his companions he conducted splendid daily poojas offering fresh flowers and sweet-meats to the deity.

In his father's home it was a daily custom to read the sacred books like the Ramayana, Bharatha and Bhagavatha. On holidays Subramonia too attended their reading and recitations with love and devotion. With the elders he participated in all his forgetting every thing else and rejoicing in the glory of the Lord. Once, as he was listening to a hyperbolic description of the wealth and splendour of Ravana, he suddenly burst out in derision " What! Was Ravana daily filling his stomach with gold and precious stones? Or was he eating rice like everyone of us? If rice was his food, of what use were all those hoarded stones and gold to him?" Hearing these scornful words uttered in such a tone all who were present at the recital appreciated the boy's cleverness as well as his total disregard of material riches.

It is well-known, both in the world of experience and science, that children are like tender plants which can be trained into any shape. It is also a matter of common experience that children are fond of gay dress and glittering ornaments. However, Subramonia was an exception. He refused to imitate others

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blindly. He acted independently, did what appeared right to him in the light of his own knowledge. His loving parents used every means to persuade him to wear costly jewels and put on glossy silk but all in vain. He appeared all the more attractive in his utter, unornamented simplicity.

Neither the external things like the body nor the internal things like the mind are new. They are most ancient, and have been existing all along. The manifestation of life is called birth; its disappearance is called death. In the ultimate analysis there is neither birth nor death. Every jeeva assumes several similar and dissimilar bodies. While in each of these bodies it performs several actions and acquires many pieces of knowledge. It is the sum total of the impressions resulting from the knowledge so acquired and actions so performed that is called 'mind'. It is to be supposed that the impressions so acquired in previous lives were responsible for the boy's spirit of vairagya (dispassion) and his love of God. The spirit of sacrifice, dispassion and devotion can sprout up only out of the seed of 'samskara' carried over from previous lives and in conformity with it. The worship of God practised through several lives without an eye to its result by the great souls who have conquered all desire, bears fruit in good time. The long and short of the matter is this: the great souls are born as a result of such worship of God. (Great souls are born not made.) The saying of the wise thus shows itself correct. Viewed in this way it will be clear that the rudiments of Subramonia's noble aspiration were already present at his birth. The love of worldly pleasures could hardly touch his budding aspiration, much less hurt it. It remained safe and sound, being fenced round by the merit carried over from past lives. The boy, rich in the possession of such auspicious influences, studied Malayalam upto the ninth year and then joined a school at some distance from home to study English. Subramonia who was dear to his parents like the apple of the eye, devoted himself to his studies with enthusiastic attention and shone among his classmates like the full moon in the circle of twinkling stars.

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CHAPTER 3

The son, the dominant self, is the chief; the father is subordinate, and therefore it is held by certain philosophers that it is not the son who lives for the father, but the father for the son. In a worldly sense this is more or less correct; because the father considers his son's perfections and imperfections as his own. Ordinarily fathers labour under an illusion that their sons' prosperity, their educational distinction, wealth, fame etc., are their own. They regard their sons' life as well as death as theirs. Alas! this error is universal. In view of this attitude, who will be surprised if Subramonia's father built castles in the air for him? "My son should obtain higher education in English and secure high degrees from Indian as well as foreign universities. He must become a big government officer, acquire a big fortune and become famous". His father's mind was filled with such ambitious hopes and plans of the future of his son.

But, 'Man proposes and God disposes'. Subramonia spent a few years in the study of English at home and elsewhere and then lost all zest for it, even as a man of discrimination gets tired of worldly pleasures. "This sort of education in English is as dry as a skeleton. What am I going to gain thereby? I seek no job. I want no wealth. What is money for? All I want is a morsel of food once a day to keep this body and soul together. It being so, what can this education give me except some pain? Should I push forward with such education or should I put an end to it?" Such thoughts harassed the mind of the devoted son for a time. At last, the struggle ceased and in obedience to the dictates of his soul he gave up his studies at school once for all and returned home. He was, alas! like a thoughtless bridegroom who stole away from the wedding hall giving up a most desirable marriage and dashing all future prospects to the ground. His father and relatives were surprised and painted. Achuthan Nair fondly remonstrated with his son; his relatives angrily rebuked him. It was all the same; Subramonia remained adamant. He never more returned to his school.

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Subramonia's good mother, who was an ideal wife and an ideal parent, was already dead. To his father's mind which had been filled with the sorrow of bereavement, Subramonia's seemingly imprudent conduct proved the last straw. He almost broke down under the fresh grief. Really it is not wife or child or wealth that gives us pleasure or pain. By themselves they can not touch us. It is only when we look for pleasure from them, they turn out to be a source of pain, for the wise who are really selfless everything is a source of pleasure. One day Achuthan Nair lovingly advised his son to resume his studies: "My son, you are wise. Then why have you, like a fool, stopped your studies to idle away your time? What do you intend to do? What is your plan? Of course, you have money enough. But without education how can you get enlightened? How many students eager for higher education, are compelled to stop their studies on account of grinding poverty? In your case there is no lack of resources; yet, you don't like to continue your English education. Is it not really disconcerting?" Subramonia, who was then only sixteen, replied to his father with respect and humility, "The truth is, I don't like school life. That is why I gave it up. There is no other reason. It doesn't mean that I have put an end to my studies. In fact, I love the learned books written by English scientists and the noble poems composed by English poets. They are most dear to me. I continue to study them with the help of various scholars. But I long to study Sanskrit also. In this birth, the course of my life is naturally determined by the tendencies inherited from my previous lives. Nobody need entertain any materially high hopes about my future".

His father, however, refused to let him go abroad to study Sanskrit. So Subramonia continued to stay at home studying the language as well as he could. A local scholar, Sankaran Nair, introduced him to the Sanskrit poets. Under another scholar named Krishna Sastri he started studying literature and grammar. All the while he continued to labour at Malayalam literature according to his natural inclinations. He also read through a number of English books on eastern philosophy, either in the original or in translation. The marvellous lives

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of ancient acharyas like Sri Sankara, and Ramanuja, and of the modern ones like Rammohan Roy, Sri Ramakrishna, Rama Theertha, Vivekananda, and Dayananda Saraswathi greatly interested him. Not only their biographies and teachings, but also the teachings of the Buddha, Christ and Mohamed were studied with unwearied interest. In short, he read through all the religious books he could lay hands on.

Extensive as his reading was, it alone did not satisfy him. Not content with a mere understanding of words, he tried to get at their inner significance through tireless meditation. Once he learnt something from books or teachers, he continued to ponder over the subject until all doubts were cleared and the ideas became crystal clear. Once in those days his mind was assailed by a doubt. "I slept soundly; I was aware of nothing." Is this knowledge of the awakened sleeper a matter of memory or inference? He thought deeply over the question by himself and with the help of learned men. But at that time, his intellect was not sharp enough and sufficiently trained to comprehend in full the arguments demolishing the inference theory. Yet, even then he could mostly follow the intricate reasoning to its logical conclusion. He undertook the study of books not as a dull task, but as a labour of love.

His life during this stage of his career was characterised by a regular routine. Every day he would get up early, bathe, meditate upon Siva and read some sacred hymns to his favourite Deity. Next he would go through some scientific treatises and the Upanishads. Only then would he have his breakfast. Both in the morning and evening he would several times repeat the Panchakshari mantra which his father had taught him to forestall calamities and which he liked immensely. Of all gods, Siva was his favourite Deity. A man or god can become dear to a person only according to that person's 'samskara'. In the case of Subramonia it was the peculiar qualities and habits of Siva that fascinated him. Staying in the cremation ground, smearing the entire body with sacred ashes, residing on Mount Kailas, the use of animal hide for clothing, severe penance, burning Kamadeva for sport, quick and easy gratification, eating of poison etc., which are the causes of the destruction

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of the super imposition on body and which are the acme of knowledge, detachment, physical and mental control and which were most dear to Subramonia's mind—were the topics of his meditation. The identification of the worshipper and the worshipped is the end and aim of worship. It is the ideal which you want to attain that you should meditate upon. He who meditates upon renunciation becomes a man of renunciation. He who meditates upon worldly pleasures becomes a worldling. Some become great, some become mean—all according to each one's contemplation. This is the meaning of the Vedic saying "सयत्क्रतुर्भवति तत्कर्मकुरुते यत्कर्मकुरुते तदभिसम्पद्यते". Whether the god of our meditation actually exists or not, it is certainly possible to meditate and also to secure the fruits of meditation. That being our experience, why waste our energies in vain controversies? Even among the ancients there was much argumentation as to the true nature of gods—some believed that they had form; others held that they had no form except of the mantra. The moderns accept neither of these views. Let those who believe in them keep their belief. If others do not believe in them it means only that they do not want them. To debate upon the subject is as meaningless as arguing about the complexion of the crow or the number of its teeth.

Enough with this digression. Let us now return to the subject proper. Subramonia did not get addicted to the habit of drinking tea or coffee early in the morning. Nor did he get used to eating any food very early. As he had already mastered his senses no thought of taking forbidden food entered his mind. In the neighbourhood of his father's home there was a small but beautiful wood. There solitude reigned supreme. On evenings he would retreat into this forest, lovely with trees and flowers and resounding with the melodious songs of birds, and spend hours and hours, meditating upon the greatness of God's creation. Steeped in the reflections and the Divine sport, he lost all count of time. Day passed into night and night passed into day; he was altogether unaware of such changes. Like a man drunk he moved about the forest

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fearless of the perils that encircled him. "Wonderful indeed is the glory, Oh Lord, who has created this world so full of variety and novelty! In every charming sight around there is but an infinitesimal manifestation of thy glory and greatness. May thou give me, O Lord, in this very life the capacity to enjoy the charm of thy matchless beauty as people enjoy the sight of the lovely moon. So he used to pray in all sincerity.

So Subramonia grew up into a thoughtful boy. He was now a full-fledged youth but the youthful longings for worldly pleasures never entered his mind. He loved to spend his time in solitude reading more and more books on spiritual life. Beauty of nature charmed him. Only on hills and in forests, on the banks of rivers and on the shores of lakes did he find peace of the soul. The starry sky lit up with the bright full moon filled his mind with celestial thoughts of ineffable bliss. "What a curious fellow" the women jeered at him, "Why does he not participate in sports and merriments? He passes his days in solitary forests, thinking and thinking! Like an old dotard he smears his body with ashes and wastes his precious life mumbling holy names".

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CHAPTER 4

Circumstances brought Subramonia's studies (in grammar and literature) under Sri Krishna Sastri to an abrupt close. But they were soon resumed under another reputed teacher of grammar, Sri Venkitachala Sastrigal. Sri Sastrigal resided in a neighbouring village. He came to Subramonia's father's house and taught him Siddhanta Kaumudi and certain other books on logic. As he was paid a handsome fee, the tuition was continued for long. Subramonia benefited considerably by his tuition. He soon gained a degree of mastery over the language. A poem he composed in his eighteenth year, "VIBHAKAROM" met with wide appreciation. Scholars encouraged him to continue his poetic efforts. Still in his teens he dedicated laudatory poems to reputed persons like Sri Kerala Varma Koil Tampuran—men of ripe age, who had won his admiration with their learning, literary talents, etc., and got their blessings and encouraging words. This was especially gratifying to him because he was deeply respectful to old people and full of humility in their presence. Remarkably similar was his attitude to Brahmins. Foremost among the Malayali Brahmins is Azhvanchery Thamprackal. At his time, the head of the family was a saintly man, named Narayana, equally distinguished by his deep erudition and noble virtues. Subramonia prostrated himself at his feet on two occasions, gave him suitable dakshina, presented him with laudatory poems and secured his blessings. Subramonia now felt himself a new man, shorn of all his sins. This is just one of the innumerable instances of doing his obeisance to worthy people.

Once, after receiving Sri Sastrigal courteously, Subramonia's father respectfully asked him: "Of what use is the study of Nyaya to my son?" Sri Sastri replied, "The study of Nyaya will help your son in the study of Vedanta. I need not add that the study of Vedanta will help deserving persons possessing Vairagya (dispassion) spirit of renunciation, etc., to realize God". There was nothing extraordinary about the reply, but the reaction it set up was strange and unexpected. Achuthan Nair who shocked as if he had been suddenly struck by a lightning.

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Where is the father who would like his son to grow rich in dispassion, in the spirit of renunciation and in the thirst for God-realization? Some may treat Sanyasins with respect and pay homage to their holiness, but how many of them would like to see their own sons accept Sanyasa? Every parent wishes his or her son to get rich and lead a life of luxury and ease. That is the general rule. "I shall renounce the world and withdraw into the forest, but my son should stick to his place." Such is the sincere desire of every father. How odd is the work of illusion!

Now, what about the son? As a result of the perusal of spiritual books and of the Samsakara inherited from previous lives, his eagerness to obtain a vision of God and his spirit of dispassion were growing with his years. He had read the lives of many saints who had risen above feelings of pleasure and pain, hope and fear, etc., conquered all desire and were bent upon achieving Liberation. Naturally his pure and innocent mind was filled with a desire to accept Sanyasa. That seemed to him to be the summum bonam of existence. "It is the cord of desire that binds man to the world. He alone is liberated who has broken those cords and shaken himself free of them. The man under the leading strings of desire is like the bullock that perpetually sweats and frets and groans, pulled up by the string passed through its nose. In this transitory world there is nothing really attractive to wise men. No money, woman or prosperity affords lasting happiness to man. Who is there that would give up the principle of Godhead that affords everlasting peace and joy to run after fleeting, mirage-like worldly enjoyments? If, having been born as man, one pursues worldly wealth in preference to the other worldly, he is like one discarding the richest and most delicious food served in golden dishes to eat poor, nauseating stuff served in dirty repulsive rusty, iron plates. The noble prince Siddhartha gave up his new born son, his dear beautiful wife and even his throne to become a religious mendicant. Then, what is there to prevent me from leaving my empty home? God alone is eternally true. Without Him I shall be as good as dead. What is the use of a life-in-death? Such a life I won't have. I do not want to live like

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a bird in a cage. My desire is to become a wandering mendicant finding my joy in the soul within. Let me wander in the Himalayas as a Sanyasin, imbibing supreme peace from the tranquillity of the holy region. May God within me aid me to fulfil my desire".

Such were the noble thoughts that passed through Subramonia's mind. However, he did nothing rash. Though young, he was intelligent and thoughtful. So he did not like to depart abrupty from home or inflict unnecessary pain upon his father and other relations. He therefore bided his time. Meanwhile he continued his studies in right earnest.

Contrary qualities like heat and cold cannot exist together in the same object. Nor can East and West be at one. Similarly, the thirst for the pleasure of the world and the resolute desire to win Liberation cannot exist side by side in the same person. Love of God is the bright sun; desire for sensuous pleasures in darkness itself. The one destroys the other in no time. God is full, eternal bliss. Worldly pleasures are imperfect and momentary. How can a man who has found perennial bliss abandon it for anything else? He who pursues sensuous enjoyment can never realise God; he who is intent upon finding God can never indulge in worldly pleasures. That is why the wise ones proclaim that the choice of a spiritual life is the highest, the noblest, and the best. That is the way to eternal happiness. What really matters is not external renunciation, but the internal. To assume the saffron robe, and adopt other external signs of renunciation is really the least important. Those who go in for them foolishly are actually following ignorance, untruth.

Besides, all living things display an eager desire to enjoy the pleasures of the senses. If intelligent people gifted with the power of discrimination too, do the same, what difference is there between them? If the object of education is to enjoy sensuous pleasures, are not animals in a more favourable predicament? They do not sweat and labour, yet they enjoy all natural pleasures. Man who proudly claims himself to be the roof and crown of creation will thus find all his superiority gone! Man bothers so much about honour and dishonour, hope and fear, sorrow and joy, health and ill-health and the uncertain

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prospects of the future. Nothing seems to worry the lesser animals. If man does not exercise his God-given intelligence to discriminate between the ephemeral and the eternal and realise the Self through the spirit of dispassion, it can serve only to torment him; it can never lead to Liberation and everlasting Bliss. He alone is wise who has discovered the evil inherent in worldliness, conquered desire, anger, etc., checked sorrow, delusion, etc., and concentrating the mind on God has found God in everything. There is no height of worldly prosperity upon which some pain or sorrow does not cast its shadow. It is impossible to exhaust desire through enjoyment, so the only way to overcome it, is through right thinking. To discriminate between the real and the unreal is the work of the mind. To rise above all desires and hopes and their resultant activities is to reach a higher plane. It is a matter of shame that man who has attained the power of discrimination through sheer merit should, like fools, give up thought and run after the fleeting sensuous experience of worldly existence.

Well, let us continue our story. In a few days, as if by some Divine dispensation, bent upon gratifying Achuthan Nair's desire, Sri Venkitachala Sastrigal left the place and the tuition abruptly came to an end. The fact was, Sri Sastrigal had secured a lucrative lecturership in some far off college. The turn of events could not dishearten Subramonia or drive him to despair. To the diligent there is nothing like obstacles. The word finds its place only in the dictionary of the lazy and the idle. Subramonia exerted himself night and day to study Sanskrit works. In a short time, with the help of certain eminent scholars, he went through "Sahithya darpana" and such works on literature as well as "Chambu Kavyas" like "Bharata" and "Ramayana" and dramas like "Hanuman nataka". It is no wonder that he, so gifted with the sense of natural beauty, took delight in literary appreciation. After all, are not literature and beauty inextricably connected?

Subsequently he turned to the study of certain preliminary works on Vedanta, and various commentaries on the Geetha and the Upanishads. He studied them all with close attention. All the while he was enjoying the deep pleasure arising from

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the contemplation of God's glory and the nature of Brahman. Such was the bent of his mind. Often, while he was going through books however pleasant, his mind strayed away from the reading to steep itself into the bliss of Divine contemplation.

Of course, Subramonia knew that the concept of formless Brahman alone is true; yet he assiduously persisted in the 'japa' of 'Panchakshara mantra' and the contemplation of God in the form of Siva. He had already learnt the whole of Geetha by heart. Every day he recited all the eighteen chapters fully adverting to the sense of each stanza. Within the ambit permitted by his father he visited the holy temples and theerthas deriving immense pleasure from such visits. He was now in his adolescence. But lustful thoughts never entered his mind. Tempting moonlit nights he passed in Divine contemplation or in the thought of the pleasures of Sanyasa. He observed the utmost purity in thought word and deed. In the eagerness to reach his goal, he passed his days in constant dread of meddlesome kinsmen. He held evil men like serpents at a distance. If ever chance forced him into their company, he turned over the misfortune to good account. It confirmed him in the scrupulous observance of moral rules. It is the force of the fall that determines the force of the rebound. Scrupulously moral as he was, his comeliness roused the passion in the hearts of fair women. Wonderful is the Divine sport that casts a shadow even over the fair face of the moon. Here was a bachelor eligible in every way—rich, handsome, learned, yet young. No wonder if parents with girls of marriageable age wished to get him for a son-in-law (After all, it is the way of the world. Self-interest blinds man). Their wise counsels regarding marriage and acquisition of wealth fell flat on him. He listened to them defferentially but as one listens to the fairy tales narrated by old nurses. How can a man gasping for life enjoy love-play?

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CHAPTER 5

Relentless time was on the march. Our hero was now twenty-one. All on a sudden his father, rich, liberal and universally honoured, passed away leaving all mundane riches behind and taking with him nothing but the fruits of his actions. Many of the kinsfolk felt orphaned. His numerous friends were immersed in grief.

In due course all living things decay and dissolve. Death waits for none. Only the wise man learning detachment from this power of time, can transcend time. Time cannot swallow him. Alas! Thinking in terms of 'I', 'my' and 'mine', without trying to realize the Self, man wastes his precious life, attached to wife and child, pelf and power and influence, ever under the illusion that he is enjoying while all the time he is suffering and sorrowing. Rich or poor, ignorant or enlightened, outcaste or Sanyasin, good, bad, or indifferent all are subject, even as the worms and the vermin are to the assault of worldly sorrows. Of all man's innumerable desires if one remains unfulfilled he cannot taste of happiness or peace. How can he hope to come by divine qualities? Selflessness is indeed a rare virtue. Everyone will readily declare that he or she lives for others and works for others but all the boasted selflessness will be found to terminate in self interest. One can acquire selflessness only through painful penance and endless effort extending over innumerable lives. To attain it is the ultimate object of human life, as it liberates man from the chains of births and deaths. It is the gist of Vedantic teachings and of the teachings of the Buddha. Until one reaches the state of desirelessness, one has no escape from the clutches of death.

Father wanted to do much but because he was called off prematurely before he had time to do anything, relations and friends were flabbergasted. They had not the nerves to face the situation. Subramonia, of course, knew that there was no resisting the decrees of Providence. Moreover, by his very nature he was unattached. Yet his mind was moved slightly. But using the power of discrimination which he had already made his own, he preserved his tranquillity and what was more,

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had the presence of mind to console the sorrowing kinsfolk and friends telling them that the inevitable must happen sooner or later. He performed all the funeral ceremonies in strict accordance with the customs of the community. As the eldest son he observed 'vrita' for forty-one days and performed 'sraddhas', etc. On the fortyfirst day, he went to the Peroor temple, already familiar to him, and performed the last rites connected with his father's demise.

The obsequies over, Subramonia sought to lift up his mind from the depths of sorrow to the feet of God by composing a beautiful hymn called "Vishnu Yamakom". For a man harassed by the three sorrows (connected with his own body, other beings and elements) and there is no refuge other than the thought of God, the singing of His glory and complete surrender to His will. They are like the gentle rain from heaven which saves the poor wild animals fleeing in fear of life from a spreading forest fire, by putting it out.

Love of God is the highest and the best means to man's happiness here and hereafter. That is why the man afflicted with sorrows, the man of curiosity, the man who desires wealth and the man of right knowledge turn to Him. For the same reason Subramonia's mind was fixed on God. Narada and other advocates of Bhakti marga prefer it to the other three ways—"Karma, Dhyana and Jnana"—as the easiest and the best. They have dealt elaborately with the method of Bhakti or devotion. Their view has been borne out by actual experience. The practice of Bhakti requires no material wealth like cow and gold, no stupendous effort to control the activity of the mind, no exceptional powers of discrimination. Without a touch of devotion all the three other methods become dry, dull, insipid and vain. Bhakti alone is charming. Love of worldly pleasures is charming too, but it is fleeting like the lightning and it is the root of sorrow and so it is to be avoided. On the contrary, love of God is untouched by sorrow; it is eternal and of the nature of bliss and so to the seekers of Liberation it is most desirable and acceptable.

The man who takes refuge in God with faith and devotion is never cast out of the path of earthly joy or Liberation.

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Intoxicated with Divine love he loses consciousness of external and internal suffering because in him there is no longer the identification of the Self with the body. It is this identification that is at the root of all human suffering. Besides, both earthly and heavenly prosperity have the same source. Taking shelter in God is, therefore, the best means to either of these ends. This throwing oneself completely on the protection of God with full faith is what is called devotion to God.

Bhakti is of two types; Sadhana Bhakti and Sadhya Bhakti. Of these Sadhana Bhakti or Apara Bhakti is dwaita in form, *i.e.*, it recognises two entities. But Sadhya Bhakti is monistic. It is called also Para Bhakti. Between Para Bhakti and Advaita, therefore, there is no difference. There is no question of the one being superior or inferior to the other because they are identical. In the light of this truth it looks childish and meaningless for the Bhaktas and the Advaitins to argue about the superiority of the one to the other. Those who know the truth through rich experience laugh at these heated debates. The best way to generate true devotion is through association with the knowers of truth (Satsangha). He who secures the graces of the good and wise, and has firm faith in them and their conduct, will gradually contract a liking to hear the story of the Lord and His glorious attributes. Step by step, his mind steeps itself in Divine love and devotion.

No such step-by-step procedure was required in Subramonia's case. In previous lives his mind had been prepared to plunge straight into the depths of devotion, and so it did. Even from childhood he displayed fervent devotion to God with form. From the first, his mind got immersed in God. The several stages of devotion detailed in the Bhagavata, he did not require to pass through. "श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णो स्मरणं पादसेवनम् । अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥" His mind experienced deep delight in the contemplation of God. That required no external aids and it therefore specially suited his taste. Of the five recognised states of devotion, namely, Sakhyam (comradeship), Dasyam (slavery), Vatsalyam (affection), Santam (tranquil meditation), and Madhuram (sweetness), what

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he liked most was Santam. His devotion was characterised by deep meditation. As a result of constant meditation he could see the beloved form of the Lord in dreams and enjoy great delight. He saw even other forms he had not worshipped in this life. Perhaps those visions were the result of his worship in previous lives. However, he made no special effort to get such visions repeated in waking hours or to have them at his command.

Aware as he was of the importance of the path of devotion, it was the path of knowledge with its ideas of induction and deduction that claimed his regard and esteem. Gradually he cut down his activities in other fields and began to devote himself more and more, day and night to the practice of contemplation. 'Pranayana' and other processes of Hathayoga had a great vogue in Kerala. But having understood how helpless that yoga was in the realisation of truth, our hero paid little attention to it. Yet, for a short time, he practised certain postures (ās-anās) and 'kumbhaka' which conduce to the concentration of the mind.

Well, let us resume the story. What Subramonia had already learnt by meditation, he now realized by experience with the death of his father he was now fully convinced of the unsubstantial nature of worldly existence. After the demise of his dear mother the fire of dispassion had been smouldering in his mind. With his father's death it blazed up into flame. Till now he was taking his orders from his father. Now he was free. Resolute and fearless in the discharge of his duties, he did not yet break away from custom and tradition. Out of respect for his father he had suppressed his desire to take to Sanyasa. With his beloved father gone, the old desire acquired almost irresistible force. The idea of throwing away all the rich parental estate, and leaving not only relatives but also everything else that was dear to his mind, obsessed his mind. One thing yet stood in the way. His younger brother was still a student at school. To leave him alone to his fate would have been unnatural and even cruel. That thought detained him at home for some time more. His mind was being pulled in opposite directions by conflicting feelings—his desire to go

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out as a Sanyasin and his sense of duty to his helpless brother. At last he came to the conclusion that it was wrong to fail in the discharge of his duty to his brother. So he decided to stay on, until his brother's education was finished and his duty to him was fulfilled. As far as possible, one should avoid causing pain to anybody by accepting sanyasa. As far as it is practicable, one should enter sanyasa with the approval of all. Under this conviction he deferred his wish to a more propitious time. "I shall spend here a few more years in meditation, study and tapas. After all, the Rishis have not imposed any ban on spiritual practices at home. The devotee who has his mind and senses under control is not enslaved by pleasure or pain. For him his home is as good as a cavern in the Himalayas". Subramonia satisfied himself with such reflections and restrained his irrepressible desire to become a wandering mendicant. So he continued to live at home doing everything in his power to insure his brother's future prosperity and pondering over the eternal truths of spiritual life.

Although his father's unexpected death deprived him of his wise counsel and affectionate treatment, Subramonia did not permit himself to be overwhelmed by the sorrow of bereavement. Nor did he become indifferent to meditation or other spiritual practices. With the same old curiosity he visited educational institutions one after another and continued to contribute articles to Sanskrit journals and papers which brought him great fame. Eager to amaze more knowledge he once approached the reputed scholar Punnasseri Sri Nampi Neelakanta Sarma, founder of the Pattampi Sanskrit College and editor of the Sanskrit Magazine, Vijnana Chintamani. Unfortunately the place offered him no opportunities to carry on spiritual practices without molestation, or learn higher books on Vedanta. So he left Pattampi and went to Sri Kuppuswamy Sastri, the well-known Principal of a Sanskrit College situated on the bank of the Kaveri. Here too he found no congenial environment for the pursuit of his purpose. So he had to return home disappointed.

At this time, at Bhavanagar in Sourashtra there lived a famous scholar named Santyananda Saraswathi. By birth he

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was a South Indian, but he was domiciled in Gujerat. Subramonia had already made his acquaintance through Sanskrit journals and so he wrote to him about his great desire to study higher books on Vedanta. His request was that Swamiji might be pleased to come down to Kerala, stay near his house and teach him Vedanta. In time came a favourable reply. Swamy Santyananda Saraswathi wrote, " I shall come to Kerala and teach you books on Vedanta. Make all arrangements for a convenient stay ". Subramonia was overjoyed. In no time he completed all arrangements for swamiji's stay and sent enough money by M.O. for the expenses of the journey. Subramonia passed the next few days in eager expectation. But God had willed otherwise. Instead of Swamiji, it was a letter from the Chief Medical Officer of Bhavanagar State, one Sivanatha Sarma, that arrived after a few days. (It was in Sarma's house that Swamiji had been then staying). The letter read: " We cannot bear separation from Swamiji. Hence our humble request is this: Please come to Bhavanagar, at once. You can reside here with the same freedom as you enjoy at home. According to time and convenience you can study the Sastras. So we expect, you will reach here very shortly '. This letter caused great disappointment. But being bent upon meeting the saintly scholar, Subramonia decided to set out immediately. It was of course impossible to leave home with the full consent of friends and relatives. But Subramonia was now independent. Nobody could stop him. He sought to console them with the promise that he would return to them before long and then he set out for Sourashtra.

The artificial beauty of big cities like Madras and Bombay as well as the natural grandeur of the great ocean attracted him. He spent only one day in Madras sight-seeing and straightaway started for Bombay. He lodged at the well-known guest house " Sardar House " and went about the city visiting the important places and institutions. From Bombay he proceeded to the sacred banks of the Narmada where he saw many devout pilgrims throwing silver and copper coins into the river as their homage and prostrating themselves to her. Seeing this Subramonia too offered his humble prostrations to the river

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and then almost unwillingly caught a train for Ahamedabad. At Ahamedabad he visited Gandhiji's Asram. At last he reached Bhavanagar, exactly according to plan. On the day he expected to reach there, Subramonia arrived at the big, modernistic mansion of Sri Sarma. Both Swamy Santyanandaji and Sri Sarma received him with cordial words of welcome. Subramonia was specially gratified with the fraternal treatment meted out to him in Sri Sarma's house.

The very next day Subramonia started attending lessons on Vedanta and 'Samkshepa Sareerikom'. At the time, a Gujerati Brahmin named Kavya Vachaspati Sri Daya Sankar, a famous poet and scholar too was studying Vedanta at the feet of the great master.

Subramonia passed several happy days at Bhavanagar studying the Sastras, associating himself with great Sanyasins, acquiring the knowledge of Self, clearing all doubts and enjoying supreme bliss.

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CHAPTER 6

Peace of the soul alone is eternal peace. Joy of the soul alone is everlasting joy. He who turns away from eternal objects and whose mind is fixed in the immanent Self alone enjoys eternal peace and eternal bliss. It is him the Vedantins call Jeevanmukta. This is the unique goal that the wise desire to reach. Owing to his Samskara, Subramonia had from his very childhood fixed upon this goal. Having performed spiritual exercises like the restraint of both mind and body, with vigour and attention he had already made good progress along the path day by day. Not content with the rate of progress, he had wanted to quicken his steps towards the goal and that was why he went to Bhavanagar. His hope was that he would be able to accelerate his progress there with spiritual studies, 'satsangha', meditation etc. He ceaselessly exerted himself to the utmost with the sole aim, but the progress he could make did not satisfy him. The wise ones have said "श्रेयांसि बहुविघ्नानि" Innumerable obstacles arise in the path of good work. The canker eats into the tender and lovely buds and damage them. Even as big fishes swallow smaller ones, God's will often swallows our cherished hopes.

At Bhavanagar a beautiful storeyed building had been assigned to him for his stay. He had his meals with Sivanantha Sarma at his own house. In fact, Sarma had done everything possible to make his stay convenient and comfortable. His wife and sons too vied with each other in making him feel at home. Swamiji, as guru, and Daya Sankar as friend, did their best to minister to his bodily and spiritual needs. He was content and happy with such regard and attention on the part of everybody around him. But it was not God's will that he should stay on there and continue his studies. A letter from home urged him to return home "your presence here is absolutely essential" it said. Not only the letter but also other pressing duties forced him to return.

Subramonia had broken all bonds to go abroad. When he returned home safe and sound, his relatives felt almost the

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joy of resurrection. As for himself, he was perfectly detached. He attended to all his duties whether he liked them or not. Scrupulously careful in the performance of his duties, he never allowed anything to come between his spiritual exercises and himself. Whether he was in his father's house or at his uncle's or in Palghat town, he assiduously read and studied philosophical books in English and Sanskrit, utilizing every opportunity to discuss the ideas contained in them with learned men. Among such scholarly friends, two deserve special mention—Sri Narayana Menon who resided near Subramonia's own home and Sri Ryru Nair, lecturer in Sanskrit, Victoria College, Palghat. No efforts were spared to master philosophical knowledge. They continued unhindered.

Utilising his presence at home, his relatives and friends busied themselves with efforts to get him married. Beautiful girls too tried to charm the handsome young man and captivate him. But their fond assault on the citadel of his mind fortified with discriminating thoughts and fixed on devout worship of the Lord, failed miserably. He triumphed over all temptation. There is of course nothing wrong with a householder's life. It is not impossible for a householder to lead an ideal life with thoughts of God but Subramonia who had chosen the path of Sanyasa for himself could not be lured by the prospects of marriage.

Kavya Vachaspati Sri Dayasankar who had sat with him at the feet of Swami Santyananda Saraswati at Bhavanagar, was at this time staying in Bombay. He too wrote letters full of literary beauty urging his friend to marry. The letters were steeped in the sentiment of love and held out temptations to any ordinary man. Here is just one sample: "Think, think about Bharthruhari's words "अधरमधुवधूनां भाग्यवन्तः पिबन्ति" Think also of the great poet Kalidasa's saying "मदकलमदि-राक्षीनीवि मोक्षोहिमोक्षः" Marry two girls of sweet seventeen, bring them home, enjoy them according to the injunctions of Kamasastra and make your life purposive and meaningful. Why shun the highest pleasure man can enjoy in his life? Youth, you know, is like running water, It flows away never to return. Yet, alas! you yield to procrastination! How

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unreasonable! Why delay? In your part of the country are there not eligible girls, good and beautiful? To a young man like you—born of a noble family, rich in all virtues, handsome and wealthy, blessed with the precious literary instinct, who will not give his daughter in marriage? So take time by the forelock and get yourself wedded". So ran his passionate exhortation. Apart from such appeals to the sentiment of love, there were others arguing from the point of duty, "Get a worthy partner to co-operate with you in the discharge of your duties, beget children and perpetuate your line. Then in old age take to Sanyasa and endeavour to realise the Self. Remember what Lord Krishna has said "स्थित्वास्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति" Subramonia used to receive letters in the same strain. Relatives and the parents of eligible girls too exerted considerable pressure upon him. In the midst of all such temptations, he remained immovable as a mountain and majestic like the sea. All these temptations, and even those appeals to the sense of duty failed to move him, for his mind was filled with the desire to embrace Sanyasa and it was ever proceeding along the route of discrimination and detachment.

Relation to woman by marriage and the performance of householder's duties are for men of attachment, not of detachment. Food is for the hungry. He who has no hunger requires no food. Only those who long for worldly welfare need the performance of worldly duties. The man who has no desires does not require it. What the Vedas say about the enjoyment of sexual pleasure is this: "रागीचेदुद्वहेत्" This ought to restrain man's sexual freedom. Birds and animals have such freedom. But in man it leads to sorrow and suffering. It is true, Sastras enjoin the presence of a partner during the performance of worldly and other worldly duties. But why should those who have realised the true nature of worldly pleasures that cause ultimate pain and have cast away the seen as well as the unseen fruits of their work by cultivating the spirit of total detachment, hanker after the woman's body composed of flesh and blood, faeces and urine. Is the man who plunges himself into misery in his hot pursuit of happiness, wise or unwise.

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discreet or indiscreet?

In the world, even among the descendants of the Rishis the dominant tendency today is to follow other people's bounden duties than their own. Like hunger and thirst, lustful feelings too manifest themselves in man in time with irresistible vigour. Who can resist the furious onslaught of that natural desire? The Puranas and Itihasas (epics) show that even the exalted Gods—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—have not been proof against its assault. In the opinion of modern wiseacres, strict *continence* (Brahmacharya) is a pure figment of the imagination. They say that so long as there is vital force in man it will compel him to act in obedience to the dictates of his feelings. Their views that it is impossible to observe true Brahmacharya is however proved to be incorrect, by the lives of many heroic, strict, life-long, Brahmacharins whose minds were fixed on the Self. Their fixity of purpose, firm faith and stead-fastness and above all the merit amassed in their previous lives enabled them to remain true to their ideal. For the common run of men and women, the ideal is not easily attainable and so it is better for them to marry and become householders. Those who, for whatever reason, break this tradition and repudiate the time-honoured institution of marriage, deviate from the path of good conduct and become the scum of society, exposing themselves to a series of miseries. Alarmed by such familiar experience parents and relatives and friends often show unseemly hurry in getting young men and women married. Their desire is excusable and their method may be impeccable. If Subramonia's relatives and friends proved to be no exceptions, if they tried to persuade him to marry, there was nothing extraordinary or improper about it. Nor was it unnatural if lovely girls were moved by his handsome presence. But Subramonia was not the man to succumb either to friendly exhortations or amorous flirtations. Convinced of the triviality of earthly love and aware of its painful consequences, he stuck fast to his ideal. As he had already conquered his senses, his mind remained fixed in discrimination and dispassion. His conduct won the love and admiration of the wise people who heartily praised him.

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CHAPTER 7

Years passed. Once while Subramonia was staying at Palghat, several of his educated friends suggested that he should do something of service to the world. The idea materialised in the form of a magazine. It was named after the great political leader, Gopala Krishna Gokhale who had expired about that time. However, the magazine avoided political issues as far as possible. Only articles on literature, social reform, morality and religion found a place in its pages. Subramonia was its editor as well as publisher.

The activities connected with the publication of " Gokhale " necessitated his permanent residence in Palghat. He who loved country life very dearly made it a custom to steal away from the town whenever he could find time and go to a quiet solitary forest in its suburbs. At this time he was following a regular routine. Every day he got up at about 3 A.M. (in Bhrahma muhurta) and walked two miles to a river where he had his bath. Then he spent hours in a sequestered spot, repeating holy names and meditating. He would return home by 8 O' clock to attend to his other duties. Even while he was attending to worldly work, his mind was fixed on God. Almost every evening he went out to some lonely place, there to rest and meditate.

Even while he was thus living in a town he did not give up his love of solitude and contemplation. Surrounded as he was by luxuries and tempting sensuous charms he devoted all his time to the efforts of Self-realization. Among his friends were worldling and even atheists, but they could never seduce him into evil ways. The fact that intimate association with them did not defile his mind in the least, affords ample proof of his spirit of perfect dispassion and detachment.

During the period he was contributing a series of articles to well-known and well-established papers like the "Manorama." Besides, he delivered several lectures on morality and religion at meetings in response to the requests of his friends and admirers. His pleasing voice, elegance and lucidity of expression, skill in critically analysing even complicated subjects, the smooth

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unbroken flow of words, evident sincerity—all these contributed to make him a popular orator. As his fame spread, invitations poured in from literary clubs and colleges to speak in them. Whenever he could find time, he obliged them with discourses. This preoccupation with public speaking adversely affected the fortunes of the magazine. It is no easy task for a man bent upon Self-realization, possessing a noble character, innocent, truthful, and dutiful, but ignorant of the art of advertisement and window dressing, to succeed as a journalist. Two years of journalism had convinced him of this and so he was forced to stop the publication of the magazine even though it had won uniform admiration of its readers.

For some time more he continued to attend public meetings and delivery lectures at them, as well as in schools and colleges, at the pressing request of friends. He spoke on a variety of subjects—literature, social reform, religion and culture. Occasionally he made also stirring speeches on politics, brimming with patriotism. In such activities he was lovingly encouraged by Sri Ramunni Menon, editor of the " Mathrubhumi ". The thrilling speeches he delivered at the political conferences held at Calicut and Tellicherry evoked universal enthusiasm. Once a well-known scholar, himself a good speaker, who had attended one of his speeches on education at a big gathering, charmed by the beauty of its presentation and the speaker's eloquence, on reaching home wrote a letter to him in this strain " I very much wish I could become your disciple in the art of public speaking. Kindly accept me as your pupil and give all necessary tips ". Subramonia at once understood that the letter was meant more as a compliment—as a token of admiration—than as a request for actual instructions. So he wrote back to the correspondent thanking him for his kind words and for the goodness that prompted him to write them. At this period of his career he was required to offer a speech of welcome or propose a vote of thanks at large gatherings called together to receive all-India leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and poet Rabindranath Tagore. The speeches delivered on such occasions elicited whole-hearted praise from the public and won the respect and admiration of the younger generation.

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The speech he delivered on the ultimate aim of literature at a session of the "All Kerala Sahitya Parishat" was the last of the series of his public utterances. Since then he has not attended any such meeting or delivered any such speech.

Speeches and essays give a practical turn to things unreal. Out of the desire for fame and popularity—the last infirmity of noble minds—even learned men stoop to deliver vain speeches. When people ascend the platform to speak or take up the pen to write, they care more for the applause of the public than for the expression of truth. So they don't mind twisting and distorting facts to gratify their hearers and readers. Nor do they restrain their words. Words run away with them. Bent upon securing the applause of the audience they have hardly any time to think about the truth of their statements. Few indeed are the speakers and writers who follow truth, work for the good of the world and observe restraint in their utterances, without hankering after fame and glory and consequently engaging themselves in a wild goose chase. Few as they are, they are the salt of the earth. They are certainly blessed.

Turning away from public speaking and similar activities he devoted himself to the study of spiritual books and spiritual discussions concentrating all his energies on the effort to realise the Self in this life itself.

Desire is at the root of all action, good or evil. A man of detachment has no desire. Of what use is action to such a man whose sole aim is the realization of truth? He alone is entitled to a life of action, who is still attached to action but unattached to its fruits. It will help him to attain purity of mind. One who is pure of mind and whose mind is ever fixed in the thought of Brahmanand, who revels in it, needs follow no rules of action. All that such a one has to do is to devote his (her) mind, full of dispassion, peace and restraint, to the pursuit of truth. He who has attained purity of mind does not turn his mind to action which produces a state of turmoil. They may or may not engage themselves in action for the good of the world, according to their Samskara, so long as it does not interfere with their spiritual practices, knowledge of Brahman

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and abidance in Brahman. If at all they act in the wake of the world, they never entertain for once the thought that "I am the doer". For them abidance in Self appears nobler and in much more important than action. That too conduces to the good of the world.

In his eagerness to associate with saintly men well-up in Vedanta, Subramonia used to go to Madras and other towns and stay in them for a short while. At Madras he lodged with his brother who was then a college student there. He visited the Ramakrishna Mutt at Mylapore frequently. The President of the Mutt at Madras then was Swamy Sharvananda. It was a pleasurable experience to discuss Vedanta with him in English. It was also a custom with Subramonia to attend Swamiji's English discourses on the Geetha. On such occasions, at these gatherings, Subramonia met also many learned men well versed is Visishtadvaita.

It is really curious and surprising to see people sharply divided in their conceptions of God, fighting like cocks and rams. Some say God has form and attributes and that He is the doer. Others assert with equal vehemence that He is formless, possesses no attributes and does nothing. God is certainly formless, but who can deny him form? Even as the formless liquid in certain countries and climates, freezes into form the omnipotent, supreme God, just to please his devotees, assumes some form at times and in certain places. God has no attributes, it is true, but who will neglect Him on that score as we neglect wild flowers which have neither sweet fragrance nor bright colours? On the contrary, all are eagerly seeking after God, for He is the store-house of attributes, unparalleled, supermundane and endless. Even as the overweary traveller, sweating under the sweltering heat of the sun seeks the cool shade under a tree, the man groaning under the heavy burden of the miseries and misfortunes of worldly life, seeks refuge at the feet of Him who is the embodiment of mercy, who is the Father of the Universe. Who knows not this truth? The Supreme Self, in truth, is non-doer, yet He cannot be neglected as a king who has laid down his crown and withdrawn into the bosom of the forest to perform tapas cannot be neglected,

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for He is the saviour of all. It is He who gives the fruits of every one's labours.

Subramonia was attracted to the Asrama by its solemn atmosphere and by the natural beauty of the place. It was the seat of Sanyasins who kept their body and mind under perfect control and their presence and spiritual practices suffused a sense of ineffable peace all over the place. The ancient, spreading banian tree and the adjacent garden added to the loveliness of the place. The artificial beauty of a town is man-made. It reflects only man's ingenuity. The pure and natural beauty here, is the work of the great Creator Himself.

Once, on his way back from Madras he visited the famous Siva temple at Chidambaram. It was the time of the Ardra festival and he expected to meet several holymen there. Even as a small fig contains millions of infinitesimally small living germs, this temple holds billions of worlds within it, and here dwells Siva the Dancer (Nataraja). So it is looked upon as one of the holiest of Hindu temples. It was here that the great saint Nanthanar, born in a family of outcastes, won the adoration of the Brahmins skilled in the four Vedas.

Subramonia had wished ardently and long to visit the holy temple and worship the Lord of the Golden Theatre. His wish was now fulfilled. His heart was full of Divine love and celestial bliss. In an ecstasy of joy he passed a few days at Chidambaram. Many ochre-robed Sanyasins had come to the festival. Association with them inflamed Subramonia's dorment desire to become a Sanyasin. Among the Sanyasins he met there, one 'Avadhuta' deserves special mention. He was known as Chattiswami, because he had a 'chatti' (earthen bowl) inverted over his head. The 'chatti' served him as his begging bowl. He wore only a narrow strip of cloth to cover his nakedness. A rather stout body bathed in dust, a protruding belly, matted hair, a lunatic-like look of supreme indifference, an unhalting hurried gait, a habit of never looking into another's face or talking—a sort of behaviour suggesting that in this fleeting world he has absolutely no duties to perform—he looked the very embodiment of dispassion. He wandered listlessly from place to place and accepted no gifts from anyone.

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He had come to Chidambaram from the famous Subramonia temple at Palni. The sight of the Avadhoota filled Subramonia with a feeling that his life's purpose was already fulfilled. He wished to talk to him, but in vain. At Chidambaram he met also the great Dravidian scholar, Mahamahopadhyaya Dandipani Deekshitar. Discussing Vedanta with him the young man cleared many doubts. Subramonia met Deekshitar several times, both at his house and the temple. The very opportunities gratified him. During a discussion of the meaning of the beautiful stanza,

जलजं विलोक्य जंलजन्तु खण्डितम् ।
स्वकुचं विलोक्य लिकुचोपमं जले ॥
अरुणेन वीतकरुणेग चक्षुषा ।
प्ररुरोद बालरुरुलोचनापतिम् ॥

the nature and the objects of literature came up for detailed and critical consideration. Subramonia also went about the place visiting several temples and Sanyasi mutts in the vicinity. These visits increased his feeling of devotion to God and respect for Sanyasins.

Before long he left Chidambaram and went to Kumbhakonam, Madurai and other great temples where he spent a few days in worship. At last he reached Rameswar. Of the four most famous temples of India, Rameswar is the southern most. There he worshipped the holy 'Sivalinga' installed by Sri Ramachandra Himself and also the other idols with devotion. The lofty towers, the mighty walls, the most beautiful temple, the Kotitheertha and other theerthas simultaneously roused in him feelings of wonder, devotion and joy. Outside the temple also there are famous places of pilgrimage and objects of worship like Mt. Gandhamadana, famous in the Puranas. There Subramonia met numerous sadhus, dressed in their own peculiar ways and coming from different regions of India. Having visited the several sacred temples rendered more sacred by the sojourn of holy Sanyasins and having gratified his eyes and filled his mind with pleasure, he left for the Sethubandha.

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The pretty billows of the sea dancing in the gentle breeze reminded him of Sri Ramachandra, the handsome prince of Ayodhya. The shoreless sea lying exposed to the sky held its movements in check as Sri Buddha restrained all worldly distractions. The sight reminds one of Sri Rama in the form of Para Brahman without any veil or distraction. Sri Ramachandra had thrown a dam across the sea, exterminated the enemies who had broken the rules of good conduct, retrieved his wife and set an example of honourable behaviour. As one stands on the sacred shore of the Theertha, all this is brought back vividly to one's mind. Having bathed in the sea that seemed to welcome him with its gentle waves he stood on the sacred shore meditating upon Sri Rama to the accompaniment of "Om" sound. The longer he meditated the deeper was the ecstasy that he experienced. Meditation over, with a calm and happy mind he set out on the return journey. Passing through Rameswar he directed his steps to Sree Ranga, the seat of Ranganatha.

At the sight of the seven high walls and very high towers of the temple his heart was filled with wonder. Inside the temple he saw the magnificent figure of Lord Vishnu stretching itself on the serpent Ananta. He prostrated himself before Him, and partook of the "prasada". Thus refreshed in both body and mind, he spent a few days at Sri Ranga sanctified by the tread of great Vaishnava Acharyas like Sri Ramanuja. From there he went to another holy place nearby—Sri Sirapuri. After worshipping the many gods at various temples, Subramonia, still young in age, but old in faith and devotion, returned home still more refined, with his satwik qualities still more developed.

On a similar but later occasion he visited Kanchi. Kanchipuram has been reputed as Mokshapuri, (the City of Liberation) because of the presence there of Sri Kamakshi, Sri Varadarajaperumal (Vishnu), Sri Ekambareswara (Siva) and other gods. He worshipped at these shrines and thus purified his soul. Next he proceeded to Thiruvannamalai and devoutly circumambulated the temple of Sri Arunachaleswara, singing songs of devotion. Next morning at 9 O' clock after the usual

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morning rites, he began to climb the hill eagerly to pay his respects to Sri Ramana Maharshi. Half way up the hill, he saw the great Rishi seated in a cave, clad like an 'avadhuta'. His mother and brother were in attendance. The fruits placed before him by his devotees were being taken away by monkeys and the Maharshi sat watching them unmoved. Subramonia passed the remaining hours of the day in that holy place, near the great "paramahamsa" who sat silent and then convinced that Peace is truth and Peace is Brahman, slowly made his way down the hill.

From Thiruvannamalai he went straight to his native place. A few years afterwards he again went on a pilgrimage to Madura, Sri Ranga, Palni and other holy places. He repeatedly visited also famous temples like Guruvayur and Thiruvilwamalai nearer home. He met also learned men like Sri Brahmananda Siva Yogi, Mankara Swamy and other sanyasins with whom he held spiritual discussions. Among householders also he had some scholarly friends with whom he discussed spiritual matters. Thus he passed his days, never allowing himself to be side-tracked into worldliness.

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CHAPTER 8

Worldly desires are of the nature of bondage; they are also its cause. The desire for home, family, gold, woman etc., ties a man down to the world with no visible string or chain. He is like the elephant chained down to the stump of a tree. He cannot go beyond the end of the tether. He has no freedom. Yet, he is proud of his independence. Wonderful indeed is the perversity of illusion!

God is the great string-puller. All moving and motionless things are bound together into a garland by Him with the cord of attachment. The flowers may wither away but the thread remains intact. Even so, attachment remains unaffected even when this body shrivels up or gets destroyed. This clinging to sensuous objects is at the root of all suffering, the cause of the worldliness which is productive of all evil. Casting off this attachment one can find Liberation (mukti). All demoniac dispositions stem from this attachment. Leave off attachment, all such dispositions at once vanish. Desire, anger, covetousness, pride, jealousy, spitefulness, sorrow, fear etc., have their origin in attachment. It is the false attribution of beauty to objects that leads to mental attachment. One can get out of this attachment by cultivating discrimination, and by practice. So long as mind remains extrovert, there will be attachment. But spiritual practices will gradually help a man to develop gradually the spirit of all round detachment. When you reclaim your mind from gold, it will run into woman. When you reclaim it from woman, it will run after name and fame. You must bring that wayward mind under strict control, step by step, by the exercise of your power of discrimination. The senses are racing outward like horses, spurred on by the force of one's samskara following one's attachments. If one's senses are whirled about like dry leaves in a storm, how can he enjoy freedom? To subdue the senses is more difficult than subduing a man-eater. He who achieves this difficult and dangerous task is indeed a hero. On the other hand, he who allows his mind to stray away after the senses is no better than a cow without horns or tail. Apply the axe of discrimination to the root of

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this huge tree of worldliness, cut it down once for all. Only the man who does so, finds joy and peace in the world.

As Subramonia had understood, even as a boy, that attachment to worldly things is the root of all sorrow, he had, in accordance with his 'samskara', paid more and more attention to spiritual matters and less and less to worldly affairs. Diligently he kept all sensuous thoughts at arms' distance. Like a 'Paramahamsa', steeped in the spirit of detachment, he found freedom everywhere and enjoyed it every moment of his life. He did not experience bondage externally or internally. So he continued to follow his inclination to visit sacred temples and contact holymen unhindered. From his twentysixth year such visits were undertaken with growing frequency. Almost all the important temples in Kerala, Tamilnad and elsewhere were included in these peregrinations. He visited them in the proper season.

Once he went on a pilgrimage to Kaladi, the birth place of Sri Sankara. As he had already learnt about the extraordinary life and activities of Sri Sankara, his mind had been filled with faith and devotion. In his eagerness to visit the place hallowed by the incarnation of the Master of Advaita, he took no note of the scorching heat of summer and set out alone from his home. On the way he visited the famous temples at Trichur, Thriprayar, Kodungalloor, Thiruvanchikkulam, Cochin, Thrippunithura etc., and worshipped the deities in them with devotion. He enjoyed the scenes of natural beauty as well as of art on the way and at last reached Kaladi via Ernakulam.

Having worshipped Mother Sarada, who blesses all who take refuge in Her, Subramonia reached the temple of Sri Sankara. The desire to lead a life like Sri Sankara's, bent upon the realisation of Self, took possession of his soul. His heart was filled with pride as he recollected the glory of his compatriot who was also the founder of the Sanyasa order. If, later on, he was able to realise his ambition of qualifying himself for Sanyasa, of attaining abidance in Brahman, of sojourning on mountain peaks etc., it was all owing to the blessing of Sri Sankara.

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जयतु जयतु जैत्रश्रीयुत शङ्कराद्यो ।
जयतु जयतु धन्या कालटि ग्रामभूमिः ॥
जयतु जयतु पुण्यःसत्प्रसू केरदेशो ।
जयतु जयतु भद्रा भारतीयं धरित्री ॥

Close by the temple flows the River Purna, popularly known as the Periyar, with its pellucid waters. According to tradition it was while bathing in the river which was then in floods that a crocodile caught hold of the boy Sankara's leg. Subramonia bathed in the river and sat long on its bank in deep, silent meditation. At that time he experienced an ineffable, heavenly bliss. But his stay there was short. Round about the temple there were only arid fields baking in the hot sun. There were no lodges or hotels in the neighbourhood. Subramonia wondered how people who came there in search of rest and health managed to get on. If he was able to escape starvation during the visit, it was because of the liberality of a local Brahmin who fed him out of love for his guest's character. From Kaladi he went to the neighbouring town Alwaye. Alwaye is a famous health resort on the bank of the Periyar. The water in the river here is as clear as crystal. Those who bathe in it grow strong and healthy. Subramonia after a refreshing bath, worshipped at the temple and then went to the Advaitasrama to meet Sri Narayana Guru, one of the living spiritual luminaries of Kerala. With his mind fixed on Brahman, Swamiji was engaged in activities meant for the welfare of the world. His beautiful Asrama stood in an extensive compound, flanked by numerous mango trees which formed a shady grove. Subramonia was disappointed to find that Swamiji was away. But for this disappointment, he was satisfied with his pilgrimage. Now he returned home.

Similarly on another occasion Subramonia was filled with a desire to visit the Sri Padmanabha Temple at Trivandrum. It was his custom to fulfil such desires at the earliest opportunity. So he lost no time in setting out for Trivandrum. He started at an auspicious hour and travelled by train up to Ernakulam. Then he got into a boat. At wayside stations like Cochin,

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Vaikom, Alleppey and Quilon he visited various temples and spent a little time at each town sight-seeing. At last he arrived at Trivandrum. The passage through backwaters and lakes like Vempanad and Ashtamudi was delightful and entertaining. During the journey Subramonia came across many lovely sights he had never seen before—innumerable canoes dancing on the crests of rising waves, charming coconut groves on both shores fully entitling Kerala to her significant name, and the deep blue background enhancing the natural beauty of the scene. Absorbed in the natural and matchless beauty, Subramonia soon lost consciousness and reached a divine state of bliss, beyond all name and form, experienced only by yogis in their deep meditation. At heart he congratulated the land of his birth, Bhargava Kshetra, on her natural beauty. Then the words of praise uttered by the great poet Rabindranath Tagore came back into his memory.

On reaching Trivandrum he lodged with his brother who was then a student of the Law college in a quiet corner of the town far from the hurly-burly of civilized life. His first act there was to get a darshan of Sri Padmanabha. In the heart of the temple, on a magnificent bed formed by Ananta, Sri Padmanabha decked with glittering ornaments and crown, rests as if in sleep. Subramonia prostrated himself in deep devotion before Him. Sri Padmanabha is the Soil of all moving and motionless things. He is Sachidananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). He is Omnipresent. How does the Infinite rest here in the temple in a finite form? Such doubts are irrelevant. Our wise ancients introduced these images just to purify the minds of those who are incapable of introspection and to help them concentrate their thoughts on God. These are just like the fanciful inventions of children. The wise ones will never confuse and puzzle the minds of the ignorant and unsettle their faith. Let the unenlightened worship even these images with flowers and sweetmeats; there is no harm.

Having eagerly seen everything worth seeing in the famous town of Trivandrum, he once paid a visit to the beautiful beach. Shining in the evening glow, in the last rays of the setting sun, the waves in the sea were rising and falling ceaselessly. The

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sight reminded Subramonia of the minds of the unenlightened people, discoloured with attachment, and restless with hopes and fears, joys and sorrows etc. At Trivandrum he did not come across men learned in spiritual science or rich in spiritual experience as he had done in cities like Madras. In the big cities of Tamilnad one may come across scholars engaged in the study of the Sastras and saintly men of discrimination and detachment. If Subramonia was not able to meet such men in Kerala, was it his personal misfortune or was it the misfortune of Kerala? However, he spent a few days in the town in thoughts of God and then proceeded to the Land's End of India, Kanyakumari, where the daughter of Himavan dwells for the good of the world, is a famous pilgrim centre. It is also a place of indescribable natural beauty. The journey to Kanyakumari cheered and invigorated Subramonia. On the way he visited two or three famous temples like Sucheendram and arrived at the Cape on time.

Kanyakumari is the embodiment of natural beauty. The sea caresses the three sides of the temple with her waves. At that beauty-spot Goddess Kumari stands at the emblem of the merit amassed by Mother Bharat, punishing the wicked and rewarding the good and virtuous. Subramonia passed a few days in that solitary place staying in the government T.B. and worshipping at the temple. At Kanyakumari the worship of the goddess is the main occupation of visitors. In the course of his wanderings, Swami Vivekananda once visited this holy temple. It was here that he saw the vision of Bharata's future glory and became conscious of his mission. Subramonia's heart glowed with patriotism as he recalled the stirring words uttered by Swamiji on the occasion.

As he was walking along the shore where the mighty waves struck continually breaking up into surf, he collected small conch shells of the size of a grain of paddy. He then had no idea of utilising them. But at home he strung them together like beads by means of a copper wire into a rosary. He began to use it while repeating holy names. It became a precious possession. Even when he gave up everything valuable to become a sanyasin, he did not forget to take the rosary with

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him. While he was wandering in Rishikesh, Uttarkasi etc., in the Himalayas he had the string of conches still with him. He continued to use it as a rosary.

Only a person of exceptional merit can hope to get such lovely glimpses of nature and the goddess of Nature. Subramonia enjoyed the sights to his heart's content and spent some unforgettable days in those charming environments. Then he returned via Trivandrum. On the inward journey also, like a true religious mendicant, he visited several temples on the way and met many old friends and at last arrived at his own house.

The domestic life did not rouse in him any desire for wealth, fame or woman. He knew full well the mirage-like nature of wordly pleasure. So he spent all his time in deep meditation or the reading of holy books. However, birds like the parrot, the cuckoo and the dove and flowers like the jasmine and the lotus continued to fascinate him. Forests and garden still charmed him. Having shed all his desires, his sole aim now was to become a 'Paramahamsa'. His mind was obsessed with this one idea. As he did not like to waste more time, he wrote to the President of Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Madras and other Senior Sanyasins to ascertain the necessary qualifications of a Sanyasin and the essential rules to be followed by him. At times he let loose his imagination and in the world of fancy enjoyed the happiness of a sanyasin's life—a happiness hardly available even in heaven.

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CHAPTER 9

In this visible limitless universe what is the state that affords everlasting joy untainted by sorrow? Until discrimination dawns upon man's mind, alas! he remains a slave to desire. Discontent and disquietude are the characteristics of worldly existence. It is just another name for sorrow. Man knows that wordly objects are untrue and productive of evil; yet as one who knows nothing he clings to them. Besides, he immerses himself incessantly in all types of actions. Thus, by means of the cord of action, the Lord keeps the wheel of the universe in perpetual motion.

It is action with desire that produces 'Samsara'. Desire, even without action, causes 'Samsara'. But action without desire—action without caring for its fruits—does not produce it. On the contrary, it leads to emancipation. Prompted by desire man engages himself in ceaseless activities. Even if he controls his external senses and desists from action, so long as he entertains desires, so long as there is action at least in his imagination, he does not escape from the sphere of Karma. The Geetha calls such a man "Mithyachara" (hypocrite). He looks like an extinct volcano, whose inside is all boiling over. So long as he has his external senses, he cannot remain absolutely inactive even for a moment. Being subject to nature all men are always engaged in some activity or other. If, by force, one restrains the senses rushing outward, when they get an opportunity they cast off all restraint and with irresistible force run after sensuous objects. In these circumstances, if a man resolutely uses his sense of discrimination, restrains his senses, and engages himself in appropriate action, without caring for its fruit and without attachment, he is the ideal man. Even pure and innocent actions become muddled and produce disquietude if done with desire for their fruits. If good actions are performed as a mode of worship, they lead the doers to peace and tranquillity.

Action is the very life-breath of worldliness. Action keeps 'Samsara' going. If a man abandons action out of the unwillingness to exert or take pains, his inaction is bound to

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produce evil results. Renunciation of action offends against world order. It jeopardises the world's welfare. The man who shuns action too, suffers. Every man should therefore engage himself in appropriate action for the purification of the Self and the welfare of the world—of course, without desiring for the results. In the Geetha Lord Krishna declares that the performance of one's duty without attachment to its results is the best form of Divine worship.

In the world the creator intended that no only man but even all other forms of life should live in co-operation and with mutual help. If a man accepts help and yet refuses to help others in turn, his life is a futile as the existence of some inert thing. Besides, he cannot escape from the effects of sin. It is God's design that man must perform righteous acts of service to the world. Only that man can be said to be detached who receives all fruits of action with perfect composure, with perfect balance of mind and remains equally unmoved both in success and in failure. So long as one cares for the results of his action, how can he remain unaffected? The wise ones say that it is not action itself but attachment to the results of the action that produces misery. Unless a man engages himself in virtuous acts approved by good people, he will be compelled by the force of nature to indulge in unrighteous acts. If animals behave according to their instinct, it results in no harm either to them or to the world. Man's case is different. He acts as he likes, not always following the instinct. So he may harm himself as well as others. So wise men should engage themselves in action at least to prevent themselves from doing wrong. The thoughtless people speak of actions as high or low, but the discerning Karmayogin makes no such distinction. For him there is nothing noble or ignoble. In his eyes the emperor and the beggar are equal, for he does not care for the fruits of his actions. He is not elated by prosperity or depressed by adversity. Whatsoever be his action or position, his aim in life is to do his proper duty and thereby contribute to the happiness of the world.

Action (Karma) may be said to be the dynamic operation of cause and effect. During the operation as well as when the

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operation matures, it naturally produces either pain or pleasure. It is only the worldlings who find sorrow or happiness in them not the 'Karma Yogins'. This equanimity is the result of the abidance in Karma Yoga. Only through absolute faith in God can one reach it. An atheist can never become a true Karmayogin. He who desires to understand the principle of Karma Yoga and become a Karmayogin must certainly have staunch faith in the existence of God. If one denies the existence of God, logically he will be compelled to deny the existence of this visible universe. Can there be a son without a father? Without mud there can be no pot, without the sky there can be no cloud. Even so, how can there be a universe without God who is its cause? These foolish atheists, alas, fail to realize that when they deny the cause they are denying the effect as well. A clever boy builds a toy-house in sport. Similarly, God who is Life creates this wonderful universe which serves as the home of endless multitudes of creatures. Who can doubt it? There is only one difference between the sportive child and the Creator. To construct its toy-home the child requires some external material; God requires none apart from His own self. Therefore, the view that the omnipotent and omniscient Brahman is the one and only cause of this universe, stands to reason and testimony.

A seed, smaller than a mustard's, grows up into a mammoth banian tree with its branches and branchlets spreading far and wide. A microscopic sperm in man's semen enters a woman's womb and fighting against odds develops step by step, gradually forming hands and legs, head and brain etc., and assuming a comely form works wonders in the world. If all this is not the work of that Supreme Power, then what else is it? That Supreme Self is formless like the sky, subtle, pervasive and beyond the perception of the senses. Besides, it is subject to no change, having neither birth nor death. It is eternal, permanent, uniform, indestructible.

The son cannot beget his father. Similarly, Time and Space issuing out of the Supreme Self cannot produce the Supreme Self. So questions like when was the Supreme Self born, wherefrom? etc., become irrelevant. The Supreme

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Self transcends the limitations of Time and Space. It is without a beginning. It is simply marvellous. It is ever free. The enlightened Rishis have realized all this for themselves.

The Supreme Self is not a god, man, or bird or other animal. So It can not be masculine, feminine or neuter. Unlike us, It has no body; so the question does not arise whether It is a boy, or youth or an old man. It is neither stout nor lean. It has no qualities, no individuality. Differences of colour like yellow, red, white and black, states like ignorance or knowledge, feelings like desire, anger, pleasure and pain and considerations of 'dharma' or 'adharma' do not touch It.

Like oil in the sesame seed, butter in the milk, foam and waves in the water, the Supreme Self pervades everything movable and immovable. It has no body apart from the bodies of these movables and immovables. Even as the sun is the source of light, the Supreme Self is the source of life. So It can see without eyes, hear without ears, taste without tongue, take without hands, and walk without legs. By devoutly worshipping Him who is at once with form and without it and who is an ocean of mercy, with desireless action, man can attain the supreme good. When one clings to God with inexhaustible love, even as worldlings attach themselves to sensuous pleasures, that love is called Bhakti. Such love wells up in one's mind as he remembers God, listens to the accounts of His glory and repeats His holy names with sincerity and regularity. Those who seek emancipation from the chain of births and deaths should, therefore, regularly engage themselves in such acts with resolution.

A man who has not conquered his senses can not follow any of the yogas—Karma, Bhakti or Dhyana. The wicked senses easily take possession of the weak mind even as a strong wind takes possession of dry leaves. So long as a man remains a slave to his senses will he be able to concentrate his mind on God and serve Him? So, every man who desires final beautitude should certainly conquer his senses by any means and make the mind peaceful by bringing it under control. Woman and gold afford a little pleasure and produce much pain. To accept sensuous pleasures is to invite immense misery. To

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reject the one is to reject the other. With such constant thoughts man should strengthen his mind and make it firm. Once the mind has become strong and firm, he can control his senses and turn to acts congenial to the good of his self.

To indulge in wicked acts, night and day, without fear of God and to sit for half an hour or one in the morning and evening with closed eyes in stark-like meditation is not what is called a spiritual life. See God inside and outside and everywhere, know all creatures, big and small to be forms of God and therefore treat them all with respect and love, never deviate an hair's breadth from truth, duty and good conduct—this is the true spiritual life. When the snakecharmer plays upon his pipe, even the deadly cobra sits spell-bound for a time. Is there any spirituality in it?

More over, none can make any progress in spiritual life without developing noble qualities. Get rid of haughtiness, pride, covetousness, and anger. Cultivate the spirit of renunciation, dispassion, physical and mental control, truthfulness, cheerfulness, friendship, mercy, liberality, straightforwardness, nonviolence. These go to the very foundation of spiritual life. These divine qualities should be studiously cultivated. These will take deep root in man's mind only as a result of daily constant practice. Not by shifting your residence; not by changing the name of the Asrama can you change your mind. The deep rooted bad qualities of the mind can be eradicated only by meditation and practice. Wandering in whatever places will not destroy them. The fickleness of the monkey, whether at Rameswar or at Badari, whether he is bound or free, will not leave him.

Sweet, loving, balanced life always and everywhere—that is the true spiritual life. In it there is no room for sorrow bewilderment, pleasure or pain. It will be peaceful and majestic like the waveless, mighty ocean. Expressions like, Godly life, Love of God, Abidance in Brahman, Brahma Samadhi, Universal love universal service mean the same thing; they are synonymous terms. God and universe are not two distinct, independent entities like the horse and the buffalo. God is the Universe. The universe is the visible body of God. So love of the universe

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and love of God are one, not two.

To attain God is the end and aim of human life. Therefore, everything that helps man to reach his goal is 'dharma'; whatever hinders him from reaching it is 'adharma'. Only a Satwik mind will enable man to attain God. Naturally all those mental qualities like renunciation, dispassion, knowledge, mental and physical control, and endurance which add to one's 'Satwik' nature are pure and are of the nature of 'dharma' On the other hand, desire, anger, covetousness, infatuation and pride are demoniac qualities producing 'Rajasik' and 'Tamasik' natures. They are impure and are of the nature of 'adharma'. This is the test of 'dharma and adharma'. The activities of the senses of sight, hearing, tasting etc.—conducive to Truth are therefore pure and acceptable. As against this, all activities of the senses augmenting the 'Rajasik and Tamasik' natures are impure and unacceptable.

At large gatherings Subramonia, as a speaker, young in age but old in wisdom, attracted the attention of the audience with the very quintessence of the sastras in the form of counsels couched in humble words. In the company of friends and followers too he gave valuable advice regarding spiritual life. At times, at the request of his friends he held discourses on the Geetha and the Upanishads. If he still wished for the company of learned men who led a strictly religious life it was because he desired to strengthen his mind with the repeated study of indestructible truths.

One day, a wandering sanyasin from North India happened to arrive at his house unexpectedly. He had matted hair and a flowing silvery beard; his body was smeared all over with the sacred ashes. He spoke for long in Hindi. He was an adept in 'Raja yoga' and displayed several marvellous feats. For some time he scrutinised the face and limbo of Subramonia carefully, and then fell into deep thought. As if waking up from that trance he said in a tone of wonder "Brahma, the creator, has not decreed a married life or sensuous enjoyments for you. Before long you will become a religious mendicant. You will leave your dear hearth and home presently and pass your life in forests on the side of mountains". With these

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words he got up to go. In wonder and devotion Subramonia prostrated himself before him and said, " Sir, if you want any sort of service, please tell me." The sage replied " Our desire is to visit Rameswar. It is for that purpose that we have come all the way from North India ". Subramonia then gave him enough money for the journey and respectfully bade goodbye to him.

Another day he got a letter from Sri Santyananda Saraswati full of noble precepts. In the course of the letter Swamiji wrote: " Come to Calcutta if you like. Here at my residence there are all conveniences. You can come into contact with wise and virtuous people every day and increase your spiritual knowledge ". The invitation filled Subramonia's mind with boundless joy. Without minding the distance he at once decided to go to Calcutta. Neither his worldly duties nor the protests of his relatives could stop him. Eager to visit North India so full of holy places, he resolved to set out without delay.

At an auspicious hour he started on his journey. He reached Madras by train. By the very train he started for Puri. At Puri he had his bath in the sea and then worshipped Jagannatha at His famous temple. The lovely images of Rama and Krishna, the one white, the other blue, like the waters of the Ganga and the Yamuna, roused his wonder and devotion. After visiting several smaller temples and mutts he left the holy Jagannathpuri for Calcutta. On reaching the city he went about in search of the temporary residence of Swamiji. It was with great difficulty that he at last found it out. It stood at the centre of a mango grove, in the suburbs of the city. Swamiji received him with great affection and after the exchange of greetings gave him food to refresh him. Swamiji had already completed all arrangements for his convenient stay. What natural and selfless love! What generosity!

Subramonia had been nominated as a delegate from Kerala to the Nagpur Congress. He had also been provided with a pass; but he did not attend the session as he was unwilling to keep away from the company of the wise and virtuous friends at Calcutta.

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Swamy Santyananda Saraswati was no longer an ordinary Sanyasin. He had already been elevated to the position of Sri Sankaracharya of Dwaraka. He was now being held in high honour and respect by all Hindus. The present office brought him immense wealth and his life was kingly. But he never failed to conduct ' Satsanga ' and hold discussions on the Sastras in his own presence. He actively participated in them. He listened to the arguments of others and often introducing new arguments of his own. He thus showed great diligence in confirming his own spiritual knowledge. Some times he sat under a mango tree in the grove for long hours, night and day, steeped in meditation. Both from Bengal and outside, men deep in Vedic love, used to congregate at the place. Swamiji took great pleasure in discussing difficult subjects with them and finding out solutions for difficult problems. As a rule, these discussions were held in Sanskrit. Among those very clever men who attended these discussions, there were several deeply learned in Eastern as well as Western philosophy. But true Mahatmas who had translated their knowledge into life were rare indeed. Some carried their bundles of knowledge as camels carry their burden. Some were as irritable as serpents, yet others were as quarrelsome as rams. When Subramonia realised this he felt very much disappointed and unhappy. Such fellows deserve to be kept away like serpents wearing priceless jewels on their hoods. They were however skilled in the art of winning the respect and esteem of the public by false pretences. In spite of all this, Subramonia, ever ready to render every service to learned men, drank deep at the fountain of spirituality and felt supremely happy.

Before long the great Sankaracharya began to address Subramonia as " Chidvilasa ". Subramonia was still a ' Brahmacharin ' and therefore the " Sanyasa name " was rather inappropriate at the moment. But he reconciled himself to such address with the thought of the future possibility. Having thus indirectly become a sanyasin, Chidvilasa lived like a true sanyasin cut off from worldly activities, ever fixing his mind on Brahman. In the company of Swamiji, Chidvilasa also

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attended the meetings of learned men in Calcutta. So he soon got acquainted with the learned men of the city. He felt particularly gratified in getting a chance to meet the great savant Mahamahopadhyaya Lakshmana Sastri who was there staying in Calcutta and listen to his scholarly discourses. Chidvilasa himself in time won the appreciation of many learned men.

Now and then he paid visits to the different parts of the town and enjoyed its beauty and magnificence. One day he crossed the wide river by boat and reached the Belur Mutt. The famous Belur Mutt is the head quarters of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swami Vivekananda. He went round the place and saw Swami Sivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and several Sanyasins with heads clean-shaven and wearing ochre-coloured robes. They were people who had accepted the way of renunciation but they were engaged tirelessly in acts of service. Their devotion to work filled Subramonia with limitless joy. He honoured them in thought and word for following the path of service shown to them by their great master, Swami Vivekananda. He spent a lot of time talking to two or three 'Mahatmas' including Swami Sivananda. The next day he visited Swami Brahmananda who was resting at a house in the city. He prostrated himself before the aged and saintly sanyasin. While he was sitting silent amidst the sanyasins and brahmacharins who had come to pay their respects to Swamiji, somebody asked him in English, "Are you a brahmacharin coming from the Sri Ramakrishna Mutt at Madras? To us it seems to be so" Then he replied in the same language, "Why do you think so? I am from South India, it is true; but I don't belong to the Sri Ramakrishna Order. I belong to no particular Order. I have come here in my eagerness to see Mahatmas". Sri Swami Brahmananda set on a bedstead talking to the eager listeners about discrimination and dispassion. Attentively listening to his invaluable discourse in the Bengali language, Chidvilasa sat for long in his august presence.

On yet another day he went to the famous Kali temple within the city. Kali, the Terrible, is conceived of as being

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fond of flesh and blood but she is regarded also as a bountiful giver to Her devotees. Chidvilasa made an offering of flowers and then prostrated himself before her. The sight of the surroundings stained with blood, however, repelled him. He got out of the temple as soon as he could. This visit made him think deeply and critically about the "Sakteya" and other "Tantric" practices.

One day, at sunset, learned men were holding discussions in Swamiji's presence. Accidentally Chidvilasa then expressed an opinion. Like a stone flung into a lake, the words at once created a stir in the audience. Stressing the importance of Karma, a pundit asserted, "Whether a man is a Jnani or Ajnani, he must do his work (action). Into the mouth of the sleeping lion no animal enters. Similarly for a man who does nothing even the maintenance of life would become difficult. That is the view of Lord Krishna. That is what He says in the Geetha "शरीरयात्रापि च ते नप्रसिद्धयेदकर्मण:" Another Pandit: Is it Krishna's view or Vyasa's view?

Chidvilasa.—"That was the view of Swamiji too. He who shuns action gains neither this world nor the other". On hearing those words the Pundit, like an elephant stung to the quick by the mahout's goad, flew into a wild passion and blurted out "What! Is that swami of yours omniscient like Vyasa and such Mahatmas? You are quoting his words as an authority as if they are on a par with Vyasa's!"

Chidvilasa.—Whether a man is omniscient or not, if he speaks the truth, he is, in my opinion, a Vyasa or at least equal to Vyasa. Why not accept his words as an authority like the words of Vyasa himself? Tell me that".

Another Pundit.—What do you mean? Who speaks the truth? What right has a non-Brahmin to become a Sanyasin? If a man breaks the time-honoured rule, how can his words be true? What right has he to advise others?

Chidvilasa.—If a man sincerely desires to become a sanyasin and pass his life in the thought of God and acts in accordance with that desire, how can he be other than a Brahmin? Only those who possess extraordinary qualities like true knowledge,

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'tapas' and dispassion, succeed in the sanyasin's way of life. I don't understand how such people can be classed with sinners dominated by Rajasik and Tamasik natures. I don't understand how they can be denied a place by the side of Brahmins rich in Satwik qualities.

Another Pundit.—You have not studied the 'Sastras' properly. We are all people grown old in the discussion of the Sastras. How do you dare argue with us? What audacity!

Chidvilasa.—According to my capacity I have tried to learn the Sastras from such people, and I am doing so still. This is purely a matter of intelligence. This is my faith—in matters within the reach of intellect, the Sastras can say nothing contrary to reason. I argue not for victory. I argue just to understand the truth. In every way you are my elders and teachers. I am but a boy, and a disciple of yours.

Seated near, Swamiji was attentively listening to all this heated argumentation. Among the audience there were also others whose minds had been broadened by modern education. All of them said, "This is, indeed a very controversial subject. Why waste your energy in this kind of talk?" With such words they calmed both Chidvilasa and the pundits who were furious with the pride of their class.

In such ways Chidvilasa passed some fruitful days with Swamiji in Calcutta. During this period he made good progress both in the study of Vedanta and in spiritual practices. Subsequently he decided to go on a tour of North India visiting holy men and holy places. He soon set out on the journey with Swamiji's permission. First he went to Gaya. There he bathed in the holy waters, worshipped the Deity and performed "pinda dana" and other rites for the good of the departed souls. Then he went to Buddha Gaya, the famous place where the Buddha gained his enlightenment. He paid homage to Sri Buddha, the embodiment of mercy, truth, love, renunciation, non-violence etc. "Conquest of desire is emancipation. Therefore leave off hair-splitting arguments and try to overcome desire". As Chidvilasa recollected these great words, his heart was filled with devotion. Next he visited the Bodhi tree under whose shade Gautama became the Enlightened. He spent

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there some time talking to the Chinese Bhikshus who were on a visit to the holy place. He also spent two nights at the famous 'Sanyasi Mutt' with joy. From Buddha Gaya, Chidvilasa proceeded to Varanasi hallowed by the presence of Sri Viswanatha. Varanasi is famous in history and legend as a seat of learning—the abode of scholars deeply learned in all arts and sciences. At the very sight of Viswanatha adorned with the Bhageerathi Chidvilasa prostrated himself before Him in deep devotion. He devoutly worshipped Him who is the refuge of all refugees. He passed two or three days in the house of a Brahmin priest. Every morning he immersed himself in the holy waters of the Ganga, washing away his sins, washed the image of Viswanatha with the holy water and conducted 'pujas' in due form. He visited other temples too and worshipped the gods and goddesses in them. His mind was now full of peace and happiness. However, it was not without a touch of disappointment. He missed the Mahatmas whom he expected to find there—Mahatmas rich in dispassion, having their minds constantly fixed on Brahman. At this far-famed temple of learning he came across many scholars deep in Vedantic lore. But in this city of Liberation he could find out few men with restrained passions enjoying peace and possessing equanimity. After visiting the university and other institutions worth seeing, he set out for Prayag.

At Allahabad he alighted from the train and proceeded to the holy place. Here is the confluence of the two sacred rivers the Ganga and the Yamuna. At Prayag, nature is strikingly beautiful and the atmosphere is full of peace. It is a place honoured by great Rishis. At the Sangama (confluence) where the blue water of the Yamuna joins the white water of the Ganga, Chidvilasa had his bath. It was an ecstatic experience, both for the body and the mind. From the Thrivenitheertha, famous in the Puranas, he took train to Hardwar on the side of the Himalayas. The sight of the snow mountain, decked with beautiful forests on both sides charmed him. His sportive mind entered into a spiritual world of ineffable joy. The Ganga at that stage, like a fair maiden in her adolescence, moving slowly towards the plains, evoked in him rare and indescribable ex-

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perience of pleasure. At that holy place he bathed in Brahmakunda, the theertha of theerthas and worshipped in all the neighbouring temples. He paid his respects to the great sanyasins and with their blessings started for Rishikesh, just fourteen miles away. After spending a few days at Hardwar, the gate way to Heaven and Absolution, he reached there without difficulty.

It is well known that Rishikesh is a land of religious austerities. Many sanyasins belonging to various orders have taken up their abode there to perform tapas. The secluded place is best fitted for a life withdrawn from all worldly activities. This beautiful tract of land, decorated with green forests filled Chidvilasa's mind with gladness. Of all the places he had yet seen, it pleased him most. All his life he had wished to associate himself with devout men who held their minds and bodies under control and had done away with their passions. For such a man Rishikesh was the ideal place. He lived there with full mental satisfaction. He bathed in all the local theerthas and worshipped at the temples of Sri Ramachandra, Bharata etc. On such occasions he came across many devotees who had gathered there for worship. He also paid visits to the temples of Lakshmana and Satrughna situated in the heart of forests at some distance. Once while he was resting in the Asram of a sanyasin, a Dandiswami recognised him as Malayali from the manner of his dress and began to converse with him in Malayalam. After a brief conversation the Swami understood that Chidvilasa was a true Brahmachari, a real scholar and a man of virtue. He took him to his Asrama and repeatedly requested him with sincerity and humility to stay there. Chidvilasa accepted his invitation and settled down in one part of his hermitage on the bank of the Ganga. The devotees in the neighbourhood, hearing of the arrival of a scholarly, south Indian brahmachari, bright and austere, flocked to the place to meet him and hear him. When they came they brought with them various presents—tasty food, milk, fruits etc., so much so, Chidvilasa had no lack of the necessaries of life.

The Dandiswami who hailed from Tamilnad was proud of the fact that he was a Brahmin. His conduct towards other

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people was not at all satisfactory. People used to say that his inside was as black as his outside. Egoistic as he was, his treatment of his guest was quite satisfactory. He approached him with humility and spoke to him with sincerity. He took pride in being a sanyasin but unfortunately he had neither knowledge nor practice. He did not know the ABC of the Sastras. The contact and association with his guest, the brahmacharin, roused in him a taste for study. Listening to the lessons in Vedanta and attending the religious discourses he picked up some pieces of knowledge.

After the daily acts of devotion and the study of the Sastras, Subramonia used to visit the neighbouring sanyasi mutts, bathing ghats and sand banks of the Ganga as well as the beautiful woods nearby, thus strengthening his spiritual disposition. On evenings he used to visit the Mayakunda which shines like a bright sapphire with the dark green forests and their reflections. A dip in the water here purifies the soul as well as the body. He made it a custom to visit saintly men with appropriate presents and respectfully referred his doubts to them regarding the aim of human life. He experienced a feeling of contentment after such conversations and discussions. Among the mahatmas who resided there Sri Prakasananda Swami of the famous Kailas Mutt, Sri Mangalanatha Swami who lived near the same Mutt and Sri Srimula Simha Swami of Jhari deserve specially to be remembered. They were all charming in character and scholarly in their attainments. But they were men of few words. Subramonia was not well versed in Hindi and so his medium of communication was necessarily Sanskrit. His command of the language, his fluency and his melodious style pleased them very much and they blessed him. On one occasion, an educated lady who sat near Swami Prakashanandaji, listening to Subramonia's Sanskrit speech, enquired of Swamiji with some hesitation whether the youngman was speaking in that strain to win a victory. With a smile Swamiji replied, " No, Devi, this brahmachari from the South is full of humility. He is eager to discuss spiritual matters. He talks in Sanskrit only because he is not well acquainted with our own language ". This same lady who took a deep interest in doing service ot

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sadhus, after Subramonia accepted sanyasa, used to attend his satsangha and listen to his discourses.

In Rishikesh, Jhari, the residence of Mahatmas like Swami Srimulasimhaji particularly appealed to him. Surrounded by the Ganga on the four sides, it is covered by a thin layer of forest. There is solitude and silence on the islet conducive to restfulness and tranquillity. This spot is well-known in northern parts as the abode of dispassionate sanyasins. Their simple huts, thatched with grass, proclaim the dispassion of the inmates. The very sight of them is sufficient to induce a mood of spirituality in the visitors. Subramonia who was naturally fond of visiting the asrams of dispassionate sanyasins felt very happy on arriving at the place. Among the knowers of Brahman who resided there, there were men of all kinds: some who loved to practise 'samadhi'; some who devoted themselves to the way of discrimination; some who delighted in performing penance; some who indulged in the discussion of the Sastras; some who taught Vedanta; still others who preferred the path of Bhakti. Subramonia said to himself, "Blessed is this land of Rishikesh! Blessed are these Mahatmas who have attained the purpose of life!" These Himalayan regions like Rishikesh become more holy on account of the presence of these great Rishis and the Rishis themselves become all the more venerable on account of their association with such sacred spots. The lake and the crocodile, the lion and the forest, so are holymen related to these regions Subramonia wondered when he would be able to take up his abode in the Himalayan region and devote himself to 'tapas', passing his days like brief moments.

Prompted by the Dandiswami he frequently visited the sanyasins from the south, especially from Kerala and Tamilnad. These sanyasins lived in huts built in the small forests on the bank of the Ganga. On seeing them Subramonia's mind swelled with patriotism. Lovingly he enquired about their well being and spent some time in their company. Their leader was a Mahatma from Kerala, Govindagiri by name. He was pious and modest, free from egoism. His speech was charming. He took delight in rendering service to all those sadhus who needed it. He was the President of the newly started Rama-

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nasram. When Subramonia went to meet him he received him with respect and affection, and entertained him along with other sanyasins. He then gave a detailed account of the mode of their life in the Asram. He dealt with the rules regarding their bath, food, worship, etc. From his words Subramonia fully understood the hardships of the life at Rishikesh. That did not discourage him. On receiving all necessary information and much useful advice, he felt only pleased. Govindagiriji told him, "If you like to stay here, we shall at once get a hut ready for you in a suitable place and see to your other conveniences. We are at your service". It was indeed a tempting offer but, for the time being, Subramonia could not accept it.

Subramonia devoted the forenoon to bath, worship, meditation and the study of the sacred texts and in the afternoon he went about meeting the sadhus and listening to their words of wisdom. At sunset, sometimes on the sandbanks of the Ganga or in the bowers of the forests, on her banks, he sat in the Siddhasana meditating upon Brahman. He then realised the acme of knowledge through the ecstasy of the soul. Many happy unforgettable days he spent there in spiritual practices and supersensuous joy. At last he returned to Hardwar with a devout prayer to Himavan and to the Ganga that he might be enabled before long to return to them for further worship and 'tapas'.

At Hardwar he stayed in a college with the head of the institution. During this sojourn he visited many sanyasins both in Hardwar and Kankhal. Among them Sri Mangal Giriji advanced alike in age and knowledge, Sri Swami Kalyananandaji, President of the Kankhal Sri Ramakrishna Mutt and Swami Kesavanandaji deserve special mention. Subramonia paid a visit also to the Aryasamaj leader Swami Sri Sradhanandaji at Kangri, near Kankhal. Swamiji was then old and bedridden; still he discussed many subjects with his young visitor who was seated by his bed. Swamiji's son, a youngman who was also a teacher in the Gurukula, took Subramonia round and showed him the different parts of the institution. At evening Subramonia returned to Hardwar. Once again he

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visited the educational centre situated in a solitary region and surrounded by beautiful natural scenery. The sight of the institution helped to conjure up before his mind the ancient Gurukulas of India. Clumps of yellow bamboos, wandering herds of wild elephants, racing deer and dancing peacocks—all set against the dark green forest, were sufficient to bewitch the heart of any spectator.

Subramonia took care not to miss the discourses on Vedanta held regularly on evenings near Brahma Kunda and not to lose any opportunity of meeting the great sanyasins who gathered there on such occasions. A vast stretch of rock, conveniently flat, served as their meeting ground. There, one day Subramonia happened to come across a Raja from Kerala who had come all the way on pilgrimage. With matted hair, a flowing beard and the sacred ashes on his forehead, Subramonia moved about talking solely in Sanskrit. At Hardwar, as at Rishikesh, he came to be regarded with admiration and respect. After spending some happy days at Hardwar adding to the stock of spiritual knowledge and practising control over mind and body, he left the holy spot almost unwillingly and compelled by pressing wordly affairs set out for home by train.

On the way, he reached Indraprastha, now known as Delhi. The ancient stories investing the city came back to his mind rousing his dormant emotions. He passed two or three days in the city bathing in the blue Yamuna and visiting Eastern and Western sights abounding in this ancient and modern capital of India. Generally towns are the strong-holds of materialism. In them there are no Sanyasins whose minds are fixed on Brahman or Brahmins having the knowledge of Truth. Few people are here interested in stories of God and no discussions are held on spiritual subjects. The people who live here are worldly, immersed in sensuous pleasures. The very atmosphere is Rajasik. Such places are in no way congenial to sanyasins who are free from worldly desires and are full of Satvik qualities.

Leaving Delhi Subramonia went to Agra and visited the Tajmahal which is regarded as one of the wonders of the world. From there he proceeded to Muttra (Mathura). There in the Kalindi it is a curious sight to see tortoises fattened by the sweet-

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meats offered to them by devotees, sporting about fearlessly. Having worshipped at the various temples he at last arrived at the spot where Kamsa's goal (where Lord Krishna was born) once stood. On visiting this holiest of holy places, Subramonia felt that the object of this life was fulfilled. Next he went to Vrindavan so famous in the Puranas as the scene of Krishna's boyish sports. In the Kalindi he saw extensive sandbanks which once bore the lovely footprints of the Lord. Devoutly picking up some dust from the ground which might have been blessed by the touch of those lotus feet, he put it on the top of his head. He had now a sense of great satisfaction—He had seen what should have been seen; he had done all that had to be done. The very next day he bade good-bye to Krishna's devotees and started for the holy Pushkaratheertha. After a dip in the holy waters he went to the temple of Brahma close-by and conducted worship there. This temple is unique in India. In every nook and corner of the corner we come across temples dedicated to Siva or Vishnu. But this is the only temple in the whole of India where God Brahma is worshipped. After visiting the great sanyasins who resided in the neighbourhood he went to Bhavanagar via Gujerat and Ahamedabad. He was no stranger to Bhavanagar. He himself had spent some time there before and his intimate friend Sivanatha Sarma was still living there. In that town which grew plenty of vegetables and which was blessed by the presence of several learned men, he passed some days yielding to the loving persuasion of his friend, until he got over his fatigue. With the blessings of Sri Sarma who was old in age, old in learning and old in religious austerities, he went to Sudamapuri some miles away. Sudama! On hearing that name whose head will not bow down with devotion and humility? Kuchela (Sudama) was the Prince of Bhaktas. After paying homage to him and after seeing everything peculiarly attractive about the place, Subramonia set out next day for the Prabhasa Teertha. It was here that the Yadawas, under the curse of a sanyasin, fought among themselves and brought about their own extermination. It was also here that Lord Krishna, wounded by Jara Vyadha's arrow, gave up his body which he had assumed in

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sport and returned to His own place. Recalling the Puranik incidents to his mind he gave way to powerful emotions. The place he next visited was Somanathapura. There he saw the ruins of the Jyothirlinga Temple looted and destroyed by enemies. The sight depressed him. How has Hindu culture survived to this day! Against what odds had it to put up a brave fight! After visiting the Prabhasa Teertha and the Somanatha Temple he set out by train to Dwaraka, the westernmost of the four holiest temples of India.

At Dwaraka, he washed himself in the Gomati Teertha and prostrated himself before Krishna, Lord of Lords, when the Sages like Vedavyasa realised as Parabrahman Itself. He is known through the Vedas of which He is the author. He espoused thousands of women, still He remained a brahmacharin. It was He who instructed Arjuna through the Geetha. To Him Subramonia prayed with a full heart: "O! Lord, through your Divine song you imparted the knowledge of Truth to your devotee, Arjuna. Even so, bless me with the same knowledge". In that town, now small in size but great in glory, he spent three days. He visited the famous Sarada Mutt, founded by Sri Sankara and saw everything worthseeing. He thought of the Lord's Divine sport during His incarnation as Krishna. At a convenient spot and time he meditated upon Him who is one without a second, nameless and formless, and of the nature of Bliss. In this sporting land of Krishna, as ill luck would have it, he could not come across any sanyasin, native or alien.

On the fourth day he set out by steamer for Bombay. Watching from the deck of the ship the boundless ocean in all its natural beauty and grandeur, he reached a superconscious state in which he lost all sense of 'I' and 'Mine'. He realised that the beauty of nature is the beauty of Brahman. After two days' stay in Bombay he started homewords by train. Passing through Poona, Arkonam, etc., he crossed the fertile Maharashtra, Telugu and Tamil regions, and at last arrived in Kerala. His arrival gladdened the hearts of all friends and relatives. The sorrow of separation once more gave place to the joy of reunion but even then it was clear that the reunion was only preparatory to another separation in the offing.

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As a witness the eternal Self, of the form of Jnana dwells in this ephemeral and inert body. It is by the presence of this Self, that senses like the eye and the ear and the mind are stimulated to action. Living things inhale and exhale breath because of that presence. This Self is ever pure, ever knowing and ever free. It does nothing; it enjoys nothing; it has no desire and no action. There is neigher nescience nor false attribution. Nor has it the three states—waking, sleeping and dreaming. This Self is the Supreme Self itself. It is not subject to the ups and downs of wordly life. It is one without a second and of the nature of pure bliss. This Self is the God that creates the world by means of illusion. It is the Supreme Self that the heroic ones with their tranquil mind, sitting in calm solitudes, realize through dispassion and continued systematic effort, through deep meditation and concentration. The wiseacres without pondering over the real object of life wander in its alleys and bylanes, sinking down at last tired and exhausted. The really wise, on the contrary, perceive that the realization of the Self is the purpose of life and exert themselves with utmost faith searching for it in the inner world and find it at last. The realization of the Self becomes easy for one who possesses a sharp intellect and firm faith. All true aspirants, should therefore concentrate their minds upon the hidden and noble Self and continue their efforts unbroken like the flow of water.

To the worthy aspirants who approach them in the proper way the great spiritual guides, in their infinite mercy impart instruction on the knowledge of Truth and initiate them into spiritual exercises. But it is for the aspiring disciples themselves to follow those instructions and acquire the Divine qualities by streneous effort. Even the great saintly preceptors like Vasishta could only guide their disciples. Even they could not make them imbibe spiritual truths as easily as one drinks milk, without any effort on the part of the disciple. If the great teachers abiding in Brahman could by themselves raise inert persons without any effort on their part from this sea of worldly sorrow, why is it that they, who are spontaneously merciful,

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do not raise the cattle and the donkeys, the crows and the starks from their miserable existence by giving them true knowledge? So it is clear that only by the knowledge acquired by ceaseless personal effort can one put an end to 'Samsara'; there is no other way. Apply the axe of knowledge to the root of 'Samsara' and destroy it root and branch, once and for ever. One may listen to noble precepts by the hundred, may master great erudition in the Vedas, the Vedanta, etc., may acquire great skill in delivering lectures and discourses, may develop powers of intellect and become an adept in logical reasoning and yet, if that one skill remains attached to sensuous pleasures and averse to worship and spiritual exercises, it will be impossible for that person to cure himself or herself of worldly sorrows. This point has already been dealt with in the author's "Ganga Stotra".

Subramonia who had long been aware of this truth never idled away his time. He vigorously pushed forward with his spiritual practices. Now that he had got at all spiritual secrets through association with the knowers of Brahman, even at home he worked harder than ever to realize Truth. Night and day he meditated long with great concentration upon the Supreme Self. All his thoughts were turned to God; now worldly affairs interested him little. He continued to associate himself only, with pious and educated friends who had spiritual inclinations of their own. He gradually severed his ties with his relations. He ate only once a day and dispensed even with milk at night. Having brought sleep under control he used to spend his nights sitting up in meditations. He undertook long fasts and indulged in various spiritual exercises, so much so that his body shrivelled up like a sapless tree. Yet, his interest in his endeavours never flagged. Nothing was allowed to come in between him and his 'Sadhanas'. Partly on account of such long and single minded practices and partly on account of the great merit he had acquired in previous lives, he was able to enter into and enjoy Nirvikalpa Samadhi (Super-conscious state of experiencing absolute oneness with the Universal spirit) when all sense of difference between the meditator, meditation and the object of meditation disappeared. He could thus fully

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realize the absolute oneness between the individual Self and the Supreme Self exactly in the way अयमहमस्मि (I am This Self). Since that realization, the experience coloured even his worldly activities. With it all intellectual doubts such as "Who is God?, what is the nature of a vision of God? " cleared away and he felt that his life had fulfilled its purpose.

He made quick progress in his spiritual practices, and at last reached a state uncommon and hitherto unexperienced. But alas! all these rigorous austerities and daily routine only surprised and depressed his friends and relatives. Besides it became a common topic of discussion. In addition to the regular and constant meditation and other spiritual practices and the study of the scriptures, the only activities that claimed Subramonia's attention were the perusal of spiritual books and excursion to places of natural beauty. Once while he was residing at his Uncle's he paid a visit to a nearby mountain in the company of a guide, without caring for the protests of his relatives. Upon that mountain, covered by a forest of trees, creepers, etc., and haunted by wild elephants, tigers, wild boars, bears, bisons etc., he forgot even hunger and thirst and induced by the Divine beauty all round him he experienced a state of ecstasy. He plunged deep into the forest and enjoyed its divine and strange beauty. He mixed freely with the aboriginal families and like a child revelled in their company sporting, talking, laughing. Once he visited also the Nilgiris, so charming on account of their natural and artificial beauty.

On another occasion, he set out alone from home to visit the famous Mookambi temple, situated in the heart of a forest on the side of the Sahya mountains. He reached Mangalore by train and stayed there for a day. Next day he continued his journey partly by bus and partly on foot. All along the route there were extensive coconut gardens, paddy fields, and backwaters. He felt no fatigue because his mind was ravished by the lovely landscapes. On the way he passed two days at Uduppi, the famous birth place of Sri Madhvacharya, the originator of the Dwaita philosophy. At this centre of Vaishnava faith Subramonia worshipped in the famous Sri Krishna temple

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and other temples. He visited also the heads of some mutts who were ochre-coloured robes, as well as some sanyasins. Pleased with all this he set out homewards. On the way he fell into the company of a Sastri who resided at Sringeri Mutt. His new acquaintance was modest and simple. Conversation with him was a delightful experience. Absorbed in Vedantic discussions, Subramonia hardly knew how much distance he had covered during the journey. Crossing backwaters and forests they at last arrived at the house of a relative of Sastri. The house stood in the middle of a forest. After two days' rest Subramonia proceeded to Mookambi which he reached in the course of the day. In the forests where days were as dark as nights, he experienced fear and wonder, pleasure and peace. The very thought of those majestic forests, hitherto unseen, was enough to move the hearts of men. The forests round the temple too were the haunts of savage beasts. It was common to come across tigers, bears and other ferocious wild animals in the woods quite close to the temple.

Subramonia passed three or four days there at the temple worshipping the Goddess Ambika, the spouse of Siva and the ocean of mercy. Here, at this lovely spot, where solitude reigns, the mind gets easily concentrated. Subramonia's free wanderings in the forests and his visions of the Goddess could not satiate him. But he had to cut short his stay and soon return home almost against his will. Long afterwards while he was living at Rishikesh in North India the Goddess presented herself to him repeatedly in dreams, perhaps owing to the intensity of his devotion which he felt while at Mookambi or owing to the mercy of the great Goddess and explained to him certain spiritual and moral secrets not generally known to ordinary people. Once at a Devi temple, through the priest, he also received the great 'mantra', "अभवमभवमम्बिके पार्वतीमम्बुजे" He fully utilized the great 'mantra' so received through the kindness of the goddess, with intense faith and devotion.

At Palghat, scholars well versed in Eastern as well as Western philosophy used to visit him. Shrewd men, eager to test his knowledge, they asked him searching questions on

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problems of a deep and difficult nature. Subramonia who possessed not only book knowledge but also direct spiritual experience, answered them in simple and lucid language, giving them full satisfaction. He carefully avoided the technical jargon which more often puzzles than enlightens interrogators.

Question: From person to person there is difference in desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, and so forth. This necessarily proves that the Atman is not one but many. If difference and multiplicity of Atman is not admitted, how can the above difference fit in with a non-dual Reality devoid of all qualities and distinctions?

Answer: Qualities abide in some substrate, for instance, colour. Desire, etc. are qualities; therefore they have their locus in the Atman. By this syllogism the existence of the Atman cannot be established.

If it is said that desire, etc. are self dependent, their nature as such is not established. If they are other-dependent, since a substrate for the quality is established only now (after cognizing the quality) there is reciprocal dependence. Where the verbal testimony states in general Atman to be the locus of desire, etc., it will be only establishing what is already established. For the mind is established to be the abode of desire and the rest. And if Atman is stated to be the substrate, the example will be bereft of *probandum*.

In this manner he gave them a brief and appropriate reply in clear words not conflicting with scriptural arguments.

Desire, aversion, etc. are not attributes of the Atman. They are the attributes of the internal organ, on the dissolution of which (in sleep etc,) they too disappear. So they cannot establish either the Atman or its multiplicity. There exists no means of valid knowledge whatsoever for concluding that the Atman pervasive like ether, devoid of all distinctions and a homogeneous essence of pure intelligence, is a multiplicity. Hence the view that Atman is non-dual is the most appropriate one; in this there is no unreasonableness whatsoever.

Further, what is the argument on the strength of which it may be maintained that the Atman alone, either of the nature of intelligence or bearing intelligence as its attribute, and not

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the mind, is the percipient in the body? In naturalism, even without accepting the Pratyag Atman (inmost self), all empirical usages such as perception can be answered on the basis of the mind alone. In the Atman theory, recognition* and the like are adduced as proof for establishing the Atman.

All this may more appropriately be applicable to the theory which accepts the mind as the Atman. He refuted this position in agreement with the principle: "प्रतिसन्धानकृत्तर्हि-आत्मा मनोऽपि न" "If it is argued that the mind depending on latent impressions is the cause of recognition, it is not so. For, recognizing mind also is perceived as an object. Mind present in recollection and dream is inlaid with sight, sound, and other sensations, and is therefore, perceived like a pot. From this it follows that the Atman (the inmost witness) is not the (witnessed) mind."

To explain: The mind also is illumined by the Atman as an object of cognition; hence acts like recognition cannot properly belong to the mind. The world of recollection and of dream are pure products of latent mental impressions; who illumines these? One is forced to admit that the Atman, not the mind, illumines them. Now it is well known that even as the existence of the mind (in dream and recollection) its non-existence too in deep sleep (coma and yogic absorption) is illumined by some category other than the mind itself. That is the Atman which is a homogeneous essence consisting of pure intelligence. For these reasons Atman alone is the true seer and not what is not Atman whether that be mind, senses or body. This alone is the valid view; all the rest, it must be noted, is based on error.

—*Question:* If the Atman illumines the mind, the senses, etc., why not we assume that in turn the Atman also is illumined by another entity?

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* Since the body is inert and changing by itself, it cannot cognize its unity through waking, dream and sleep and stages of boyhood, youth and old age. This recognition of identity is possible because of the existence of the Atman associated with the body. The Atman theory thus presses to service the fact of recognition as proof for the existence of the Atman.

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Answer: That raises the question: Who illumines the Atman? Atman is self-luminous; its existence is never separated from luminosity. It is the home of all light; and it is illuminator like the lamp. To explain briefly the principle enunciated: Mind, senses and body are by nature insentient. So all these are illumined by something else, which is luminous by its own nature. That is Atman, the essence of all intelligence. Since Atman is self-luminous like a lamp, for announcing its own existence and illumining other objects it does not depend on other light. Who else will ill mine the illuminator of all? If another illuminator is posited, that would lead to infinite regress certainly.

Question: There is another grave objection. On the assumption that Atman alone exists-attributeless and formless, the embodied forms of the Blessed Lord which are but condensations of Existence—Knowledge—Bliss, and Divine Realms, so dear to non-dualists, will be rendered wholly false. So what is the opposition in leaving people to hold their own views?

Answer: The body of the Lord is not an absolute reality because it is a body. Whatever is of perceptible form is perishable. Scriptural passages supposed to support their eternality can be explained otherwise. This argument may be explained more clearly for easy comprehension. In daily experience, objects like pot, made of parts, are not found to be eternal. So the bodies of Siva, Vishnu, and the rest also are not fit to be eternal, whether they be natural or supernatural. Yet in the empirical field, devout meditation on them and accruement of appropriate fruits thereof are all certainly real and so there is no room for conflict. What is with form can not by any means be absolutely real, unlimited by past, present and future. That which is perceived is not absolutely real on its own nature may it be the body of God or a transmigrating Self, what is moving or what is not moving; but it is all real in the highest degree as the absolute Brahman. Seen through the spectacles of Brahman-intuition, the entire universe is distinctionless Brahman only. Sambhu is not Sambhu but the perfect Brahman-Atman Reality. So, too is Vishnu. Every man and woman, in reality, is Brahman. Even modern

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scientists tell us that a pot, a piece of cloth or a book is not what it appears to be, but a heap of minute particles; that the visible disc of the sun appearing as of the size of a football is in reality many hundred thousands times larger than our big earth. The great scientist that the seer of Brahman is, arrives at the final conclusion that pot, cloth, book and the rest are not what they are to us in sight; but they are Brahman alone in reality. In the same manner the sun is not merely hundreds of thousands of times larger than our planet but limitless and therefore beyond all measure and count, for the reason that the sun is really the perfect Brahman. It need not be mentioned specially that intuitive knowledge born of active faith is far more complete than external knowledge gained through machines and technology.

In this manner skilfully engaging himself in mental activities, such as answering enquiries made by hearers as an act of worship and finding delight in satisfying them he passed his days.

Since his return from North India three years slipped away in spiritual practices, meditation and study of the sacred scriptures. Meanwhile Subramonia's younger brother Sankara graduated in law and set up practice. He also got married to an eligible girl good-natured, rich and educated. It was for his sake that Subramonia had resisted his powerful desire to accept sanyasa and remained at home. Now that the purpose had been fulfilled, he no longer desired to postpone the acceptance of the sanyasin's way of life. Secretly he made all necessary preparations for the great Departure. Somehow his friends and relations got scent of it. They were filled with sorrow. "Why does he make all these preparations unless he intends to leave us? What is he going to do after leaving us?" So they asked themselves in dismay. Subramonia soon entrusted the management of domestic and financial affairs to his brother and thus made himself free.

One day he called his brother, who resembled Lakshmana in fraternal love and absolute obedience, to his side and said, "On the next Krishna Ashtami Day I wish to start for the famous Harihara temple on the bank of the R. Tungabhadra,

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near Sringeri Mutt, in Mysore State. Please allow me to go." What could Sankara say? He said nothing. On the auspicious Krishna Ashtami Day, Subramonia joyously ate his meal with the children of the family and secretly set out for the nearest Railway station, Olavakkode, accompanied only by his brother. He got into the train and the train began to move. After thus spending thirty-three years of his life at home he was leaving it for good. With tears in his eyes and a heart full of affection his brother implored him to return home without delay. There was no reply. Subramonia was moved almost to tears. But he remained silent. His desire to become a sanyasin had its roots in the 'samskara' of previous lives. It had sprouted in due course, had grown, had put forth tendrils and leaves and flowers but it was only now that it had borne fruit. "I am not this body, I am not even related to this body. I am Brahman. All this world is mine. So what is there for me to fear?" If a man is so convinced, beyond doubt, and takes to sanyasa in the eager desire to emancipate himself and enjoy spiritual bliss, who on earth can stand in his way? How can anyone prevent him?

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ISHWARA DARSHAN (Vision of God)

PART II

CHAPTER 1

All that it is God. When this Truth dawns upon one, notions of the kind "I" and "Mine" arising out of ignorance, fade away like glow-worms in the rising sun. For one who has experienced the highest bliss in the realization of Brahman, can there be any attraction in joyless trifles? He who has given up the idea of limited Self and realized the oneness of the self and the Supreme Self will no longer think in terms of "I" and "Mine" "he" and "his". Whether it is wealth, country, home, it is all the same. Even in modern times, as in ancient days, there have been men, who, either out of the conviction that worldliness is evil, or out of the realization of Truth, have attained dispassion and detachment. They may have withdrawn themselves from external activities, yet they exhibit no indifference to the internal. Previously, out of ignorance, one may have run after sensuous pleasures, but now, having attained dispassion and renunciation, he is engaged solely in the pursuit of emancipation. Renunciation is not the last refuge of an idler; on the other hand, it is the state of having done all that is to be done by way of what is good, pure and propitious. Sri Buddha, Sri Sankara, Sri Ramanuja, Sri Christ and other ideal men were the greatest exemplars of the sanyasin's way of life. Were they idle? Did they simply exist like boulders of rock? Do we expect these masters, these preceptors of the spirit, to work like manual labourers—like hewers of wood and drawers of water? If they did no such thing, can we say that they have lived in vain? As qualifications differ, duties too differ. You can not expect everyone to do everything. Those who renounce worldly things, do not remain mute and motionless like wood; on the contrary, their life is full of ceaseless, tireless activity.

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The fourth asrama is thus the noblest as it concentrates itself on the realization of Truth both by observance and propagation. It is not easily accessible even to the gods. Subramonia had chosen it deliberately for himself and in pursuit of his ideal had renounced everything and got into the train. But alas, unworthy thought now began to assault him. What the great sages who know the workings of the human mind have said, is true indeed! The mind governed by its predilections, overcomes the deserving intellect by force. That was why he was attacked by trivial and inauspicious thoughts. His mind was stricken with grief on account of the separation from his native place and relatives. Brave and enthusiastic as he was, his eyes welled up with tears. Oppressed with the feelings of separation and assailed by varying thoughts, relieved only now and then by characteristic thoughts of God, he passed a sleepless night. In the morning he got down at Bangalore. He spent two days in that big town. At the Sri Ramakrishna Mutt he met Swami Nirmalananda, the great Sanyasin of the Sri Ramakrishna order. The meeting with the holyman and discussions with him were equally edifying to the intellect and the mind. In the course of the discussion on spiritual matters Swamiji gave him also detailed information regarding the holy places of North India and the availability of accommodation at them.

Leaving Bangalore, Subramonia set out for the famous Harihara temple. It was on the pretext of visiting that beautiful temple, that he had left home without raising any serious protest on the part of his relatives and friends. He spent two days at the temple, bathing in the clear water of the Tungabhadra, worshipping the deity and meditating. Resolved to go farther North, he went to Poona by train and then proceeded to Nasik, a place famous in the Hindu epic Ramayana.

At Nasik he bathed in the waters of the Godavari hallowed by the touch of Sita Devi herself. He then worshipped Sri Ramachandra at the temple on the bank of the river. Then he visited the various temples and mutts on both banks of the Godavari. At sunset he started for Panchavadi. It was the place from where Ravana, in the disguise of a sadhu, abducted

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Sita. It is not far from Nasik. The sight of the place, which brought back to his mind the whole story, filled him with joy. He passed two happy days at the house of a Government Official, a Mahratta Brahmin, who resided in the town. Not far from Panchavadi, but far enough from the din and bustle of the town, there is a lovely, peaceful ashram. It is the residence of the great Parama Hamsa, Swami Hridayanandaji. There are not many residents at the Ashram. Swamiji, who was well-versed in the scriptures and who had realised Truth extended to his visitor a generous welcome. Charmed by the heartiness of the reception Subramonia chosen to stay there for a while studying Yoga Darshana, Mandukya Karika, and the Bhashyas, with the help of the learned Swamiji. Both in the morning and the evening he retired to the forests around Panchavadi and passed several hours in meditation under the shade of some tree. He was also present at the side of Swamiji when his Brahmin devotees came to meet him. Immersed in spiritual practices, Vedantic discussions, and in meeting with good and virtuous men, he gradually overcame the grief of separation from his home and friends. One night he met Swamiji and a conversation followed.

Subramonia—I left hearth and house out of the desire to enter sanyasa which alone can led to ultimate good. Kindly instruct me as to when, where, and from which Guru I should accept sanyasa.

Swamiji—If a person like you, rich in the spirit of renunciation, dispassion and other noble qualities, accept sanyasa, it will be a matter of pride and joy to the institution of sanyasa and to the circle of Sanyasins—That is our view. We need not add that it will bring you untold blessings. We are very happy to find how blessed you are. The rule regarding the acceptance of sanyasa, as laid down by the scriptures is, One should be initiated according to rules into sanyasa, during the sacred Uttarayana period, by a Guru who is not only well-versed in the scriptures, but knows Brahman Himself. But such rules do not bind you. You have already known all that is to be known. At your will you can take up sanyasa, when and where you will.

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Subramonia—That may be true. But this is my request. You will be pleased to be my Acharya and order Brahmins to perform all necessary rites and get every thing ready for the initiation.

Swamiji—How! We do not desire to accept the status of your Acharya. Besides, you have already served several great masters like Sri Sankaracharya who know Brahman and who are fully qualified to be gurus. Apart from him, why do you require another Guru? From your appearance as well as your character anybody can easily see that you were born in a rich and honourable family. Who will light-heartedly dare give sanyasa to a person of such high qualifications? Should not one be afraid of the curse of such a person's relatives? If you desire to enter sanyasa at once, you can do so by yourself. As for you who have cast off thoughts like 'I' and 'mine' you are fully entitled to "Vidvat Sanyasa". In Vidvat Sanyasa it is not necessary to bother about scriptural rules or rites and ceremonies. Whether the time and place are apt or inapt, whether a guru is present or absent, a knower of Truth can adopt Vidvat Sanyasa. So, with the sun who witnesses all actions, and who is the Veda Incarnate, as your witness, pronounce the mantras like "Om bhuh Sanyastam maya", don yourself devoutly in ochre-coloured robes which is an emblem of sanyasa and accept your bhiksha (food) from some person who honours and respects sanyasins. In this way you can start upon that holy life of 'tapas' rarely accessible even to the gods; you can so follow the path of Brahma Vidya which alone gives the true eternal bliss. Follow the path with untiring, single-minded devotion. Mentally you are already a Sanyasin. Physically too you can embrace sanyasa, if you so desire.

Now and then such conversations took place between Swamiji and the Brahmacharin regarding the acceptance of sanyasa. In addition to this, Subramonia who knew the scriptures, thought independently for himself. "The adoption of 'Brahmacharya deeksha' is merely a beginning for the practice of Brahmacharya. Even so, the act of undergoing 'Sanyasadeeksha' is only a beginning of true sanyasa. What really matters if the exact putting into practice of the various

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rules relating to the particular Ashrama (stage in life). The performance of initial rites by itself is of no great importance. One may go through such initial rules scrupulously, but if he subsequently fails to follow the rules of the Asrama, of what use is all this initial strictness? It is therefore the observance of the rules of sanyasa in actual life that really matters. The performance of the ceremonies at the start may give the man an opportunity of planning himself as a sanyasin; it can do nothing more. Can not the really wise man be proud without such formalities? Is there any uniformity in the act of initiation among those who follow the Vedas and those who reject the authority of the Vedas, for example, the Buddhists? If a man strictly follows the rules of his own Ashrama it is of no importance whether he follows others' rites or not".

If, of all the ways of life, sanyasa is regarded as the noblest it is because it is devoted to the realisation of Truth, and not because of the importance of the rites of initiation. This is clearly illustrated by the lives of ancient Sanyasins like Sri Buddha and modern ones like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ram Teertha. Students of history know very well that these put on the ochre-coloured robes in an independent and remarkable manner. Yet, they found no insurmountable obstacles in their way; they were not disparaged or censured; their steadiness did not give way and they did not become worldly again. From this it is clear that the enlightened can take the Sanyasa without conforming to the rules regarding time, place and the presence of a Guru. Even if all the rites of initiation were scrupulously performed, unless a man has firm faith, he is bound to fall. Even if all the formal rites were neglected, a man of faith forges ahead and reaches his goal.

Thus Subramonia argued within himself and at last decided to lose no more time in accepting Sanyasa which alone will guarantee eternal peace and to do so without seeking the help of any other person. Then he went to Swamiji and told him what he proposed to do. Swamiji affectionately gave him much useful advice regarding his future career. Subramonia listened to his words with rapt attention and receiving his blessings started Northwards by train to the banks of the

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Narmada. He got down at Jubbalpore. There, by chance, he came across a noble sanyasin called Sri Sankarananda Saraswati, who entertained him and lodged him in a big house in the town. Swamiji was deeply learned in Vedanta and imparted religious instruction through delightful stories. People loved and respected him for his loving and liberal disposition. Subramonia passed some days in his company discussing scriptures associating himself with holymen and gaining fresh knowledge. These daily discussions in Sanskrit on matters temporal and spiritual carried on in a straightforward way delighted Swamiji. He blessed the Brahmacharin and wished all future prosperity. Advanced alike in age, in ' tapasya ' and in knowledge Swamiji was a most venerable person. With his sincere blessings Subramonia set out towards the Narmada, as eagerly as a lover goes to his love's home.

Even the gods sing the praise of the Narmada. She bears the sacred Sivalingas and is dear to Siva. The small billows in her pure and pellucid waters add to her attractions. On her banks, in their hermitages, several sanyasins spend their time in religious austerities. On arriving near the holy river, Subramonia danced with joy; his heart was full of devotion.

The very next day, before nine O' clock, he went to the Narmada daughter of Soma (Moon), prostrated himself to her with devotion like a child saluting its mother, and bathed in her sacred waters which wash away all sins. He performed all the necessary acts of worship in due form and then, according to the rules of *Vidvat Sanyasa*, keeping the visible God, the Sun, his witness and initiating guru, and repeating the secret *praisha mantra* put on the ochre-coloured robe, with trembling hands but with deep feelings of satisfaction. Having assumed the garb of a Paramahamsa he called himself " Thyagananda " for all practical purposes. He had already given up his spectacles and such things conducive to physical comfort as encumbrances. So now he had no possessions except his robe and his water pot (Kamandala). Shorn of all other worldly possessions he shone all the more brightly.

It was to reach this goal that he had left his hearth and home and today he had initiated himself into the life of a sanyasin.

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Filled with joy at the consummation of his desire and intoxicated with it, he thought to himself "I am really blessed today; so are my parents; so is my race; so is Kerala, the land of my birth." Even the gods long for a life of divine qualities such as true knowledge and detachment. When a mortal's heart burns with the intense desire to follow such a life, all those who are related to him in one way or other, become necessarily blessed. For the ignorant, poverty is a source of sorrow; for the enlightened it appears as a means to eternal peace and self-realization. Before the sun, Thyagananda that day prayed that he might be blessed with the immaculate purity of mind unattained even by Siddhartha, Prince among Bhikshus, who was unwearied in acts of goodness. Then leaving the bathing ghat of the Narmada he went out in search of food (bhiksha). It was for the first time in his life and being altogether new to the process, failed completely in the business. So, for the first day, he had to fall back upon a feeding house, for mendicants to appease his hunger. When he was going about seeking food he felt as if he had joined the ranks of professional beggars. A life among beggars is not an unmixed evil. It helps remove the proud feeling "I am noble; I am high-born, I am learned". Yet, it is sometimes found to work the other way: "This fellow is poor and wretched; I belong to a different category altogether. I am a Paramahamsa, deserving to be revered by everybody". Such a sentiment not only survives, it even developes and grows instead of diminishing and perishing.

Although Thyagananda had thus attained the uniquely glorious state of "Paramahamsa", his outlook remained unchanged. His mind remained fixed on the idea of equality between man and man; "Superiority complex" never tainted his mind. He did not look down upon, not only other sanyasins, but even upon worldly householders as inferiors to himself. Difference in religion or in the stages of life did not diminish his respect for fellowmen, whether they belonged to Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity or Islam; whether they were devotees, sanyasins or ordinary householders it was all the same to him. If a man was rich in discrimination, dispassion, control of the mind and body, love, cheerfulness, non-injury, continence,

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devotion, knowledge spiritual and temporal, etc., Thyagananda had no doubt, that he was a true sanyasin worthy of universal reverence. Only fools regard Hinduism as the very best religion and all other religious as inferior to it. It is these erroneous ideas of the superiority and inferiority of religions that has, in the past, led to mutual hatred and bloody communal riots. Well aware of this truth, Swamiji was, from the time he had begun to think for himself, bent upon the harmony of all religions. Well, let us now return to the story.

From the bank of the Narmada Thyagananda proceeded to Jubbalpore from where he caught the train for Prayag. At the holy confluence of the three great rivers he had his ceremonial bath and then sitting down upon a sandbank washed by the sacred waters of the Ganga he began to repeat the holy names and recite hymns with devotion. His mind got easily concentrated and he soon entered into a State of Samadhi generally so difficult to attain. Such was the influence of the environments hallowed by the presence of generations of Rishis and bright with the effulgence of the Divine. Having performed all daily routine duties he crossed the river and reached a near-by Sanyasi Mutt. Here he passed five or six days in rest. During this time he got a skilful painter to paint a portrait of his in sanyasin's garb. This he sent home so that it might be kept by the side of his own photograph, taken while he was still a Brahmacharin. Along with the portrait, he sent to his brother also a loving letter to assuage the grief of separation. " Only by the grace of God ", he wrote, " can one enter the noble fold of sanyasa; it is attainable only by persons of great merit. If I have been able to become a sanyasin, it is certainly by the grace of the Ocean of Mercy. Don't be worried about it; don't be saddened by it. Only fools will allow themselves to be stricken with sorrow by such a consummation. For years my mind had been labouring hard to reach this goal. Now that I have reached it, I expect you and other relations to pacify your minds, abandoning all anxiety and sorrow on my score. From this moment, give up all thought about this Self, abandon all search and enquiry, live your span of life, abiding in truth, doing your dharma, engaging yourself in your rounds of

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worldly duties, always surrendering yourself to the Divine Will". To cut off a reply Swamiji deliberately withheld his address. He never more reverted to the subject. He did not even try to guess whether this letter of his brought relief to the sorrowing relations or only added fuel to the fire.

After spending five or six days in Prayag, Swamiji set out for Ayodhya by train. That holy city, surrounded by the river Sarayu, had been once rendered holier by the sacred dust from the lotus feet of Sri Ramachandra and Sita devi. Who will not be exhilarated on recollecting the history of that matchlessly beautiful city? Thyagananda felt the purpose of his life ulfilled on visiting that city teeming with temples and Asrams, sanyasins and devout men and women. By the loving kindness of a wealthy and liberal-minded Mahant of Vaishnavite monks belonging to the Ramananda order, Swamiji was comfortably lodged in a building belonging to him. It was indeed a palatial mansion standing at the centre of an extensive garden. The house was empty. On one side of the building where it was all agreeable solitude, Thyagananda spent restful days and nights with pleasure. Every morning he bathed in the Sarayu, worshipped at various temples and spent much time in the company of 'sadhus' and pious men most of whom belonged to Ayodhya and all of whom found their joy in the worship of Rama and Sita. He had no need to go in search of bhiksha, as the friendly Mahant sent it on to him at regular hours.

Under the Mahant was a Sanskrit school. The Head of the institution was a philosophical Pundit, firmly convinced in the superiority of his sect and the soundness of its principles. Having heard that a Paramahamsa Sanyasin had just arrived at the place he wasted no time in visiting him. Probably he wanted also to test the new comer's scholarship.

After a respectful exchange of greetings the Pundit took his seat near Swamiji and entered into conversation with him. It is indeed a pity that the saying "बोद्धारो मत्सरग्रस्ताः" (The learned are jealous) is as true today as it ever was.

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Pundit—Respected Swamiji, do you belong to the Order of Sri Sankara?

Swamiji—We do not belong to the Order of Sankara or any other Acharya in particular, but to the Order of every one who has spoken the Truth.

Pundit—Be it so. Then, do Sri Ramanuja, Ramananda, etc., speak the Truth?

Swamiji—If they do, we accept their words with all due humility.

Pundit—Tell me then, which is true—" Brahman with attributes " or " Brahman without attributes?" If the idea of " Brahman without attributes " is correct, " Brahman with attributes " must necessarily be incorrect.

Swamiji—How is that? If somebody speaks of you who are a Brahmin, an Acharya, and a freeman, as one working under another, a servant, a person governed by another, can the speaker be dubbed a liar?

Pundit—That means in your opinion Brahman has two forms because there are two states. But you have absolutely no authorities to establish that Brahman is without attributes. The only acceptable view is that Brahman without attributes is as non-existent as the horn of the hare, it is just a figment of the imagination.

Swamiji—If it is not in your view, it is not. You are a Prince among believers. Continue to believe in " Brahman with attributes ". Only let those who believe in " Brahman without attributes " worship. It as devoutly as they can.

Pundit—No, No! In the face of arguments that establish the Reality of things, Sri Sankara's Mayavada (Theory of illusion) used to establish the concept of Brahman without attributes, can not stand scrutiny for a moment.

With this pronouncement at the pitch of his voice, like one who had triumphed in an argument, he began to quote profusely, in grand style and learned fashion from scholarly works like Sri Bhashya, well-known passages about fallacies like Asraya (the flaw as regards the locus) and anupapathhi (the law of illogicality). Swamiji with his characteristic humility, met all such arguments with remorseless logic and scriptural

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authority, firmly establishing in the end the exitence of "Brahman without attributes". On the spur of the moment he recollected the many arguments to refute the seven fallacies arising out of inapplicability and explained them to his antagonist. There are, however, several views like Sankara (with form), Savisesha (with attributes) and Nirvisesha (without attributes) to be realised through generation of lives. All of them lead God-ward, produce 'Satwik' qualities, confirm faith in the existence of God, and are in no way opposed to one another. They are to be followed by different persons, in different environments, according to the stage of their mental growth and accomplishments and so they deserve to be honoured, not despised and discarded. No thinking man of real learning will ever pooh-pooh them. Having made his point clear, Swamiji concluded his argument. As it was time for 'bhiksha', the debate terminated. The Pundit had started argument in a spirit of jealous competition, but owing perhaps to Swamiji's characteristic artless simplicity, the debate ended in an atmosphere of cordiality. The Pundit, while taking leave of him, requested him to bless his institution with Swamiji's visit whenever he had time to do so.

During the time he spent in those solitary quarters 'far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife' he passed most of his time in meditation and 'samadhi' (the state of super consciousness). No worldly activities obstructed his spiritual excursion. There was nobody except himself to call him back from 'samadhi', that endless state of illumination. For days he lived immersed in that ocean of peace. He then felt that he must set out on his wanderings again. While he was getting ready to start, his Pundit friend enquired "Have you spoken to the Head of the Mutt about your departure? If you haven't, meet him and tell him. He is truly devoted to 'sanyasin' and men of learning and is eager to provide you with money to defray the expenses of your journey". "At the time of bhiksha today I met him." Swamiji replied, "but I did not broach the subject to him for fear of being compelled to accept money and other accessories. After all, I require only a small amount towards travelling expenses. It will

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be forthcoming from somewhere, I am sure. For mendicants like us it is not good to have too much". Swamiji's words rang with sincerity and gratitude but he was unwilling to incur further obligation.

From Ayodhya he proceeded on foot to the neighbouring town Faizabad. It was midday when he reached the place. For an hour or two he wandered up and down the streets seeking food, but in vain. Whether it was lack of practice or ill luck that baulked him, he could not be certain. At a palatial mansion a big, Bengali officer told him light heartedly "You see, I am a Sudra. It is well-known that the food served by a Sudra is unacceptable, to sanyasins. How can I, therefore, give you any food?" Immediately Swamiji answered. "You are a Sudra, you say. Be it so. It is not food given by a Sudra, but food that is Sudra (*i.e.*, food that causes suffering and sorrow) that is forbidden to 'sadhus'. So you may give Brahmana (Satwik) food, if you will". The words had no effect upon that false and atheistic officer who possessed no faith at all. He turned away, refusing to help him.

After 1 O' clock, when swamiji was completely tired and exhausted, he got his food at a lawyer's. It was given with loving reverence. After the meal he rested awhile and then got into the train for Lucknow. On arriving at the town, he bathed in the holy river Gomati, worshipped at a temple on her banks and appeased his hunger with the food given to him by the priest. With the help of a devotee he entrained himself for Hardwar. On the way he spent one or two days in a town and then without further ado reached his destination. He took up his abode in a cosy little Asram standing at the centre of a plantain grove to the north of Brahmakunda. There he passed a few days enjoying the bliss of Samadhi. Resuming his wonderings he threaded his way on foot through the familiar forest of the Himalayan region towards the land of his dreams, the abode of the hermits, Rishikesh.

This acred neighbourhood of the Himalayas, praised so unreservedly by so many, was the goal of his journey. When he arrived at the supremely happy place, Rishikesh, he felt like one who had just returned to his happy and prosperous

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home after roaming for years in far off places and foreign lands. In a bold effort to develop powers of physical and mental control, desirelessness and endurance and to facilitate unbroken meditation upon Brahman, he plunged right into the practice of austerities. Begging for food, which had hitherto appeared as inglorious and terrible now seemed glorious and joyful. Who will not feel happy over what urges him to perform his dharma? Thyagananda now embarked upon a regular routine of life. Every morning he bathed in the Ganga, and then engaged himself in worship, meditation, satsanga (association with good people) scriptural study, eating food given by people with respect, and remaining undisturbed in a world of Divine experience. Such a life made him happy and gave him a great degree of satisfaction.

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CHAPTER 2

Sages have always been profuse in their praise of a Sanyasin's life—a life abandoning hearth and home, kith and kin—in short, wealth of every sort. But, does this life, which several persons adopt as an effortless means of livelihood, lead one to the goal of human life? What special benefit does a sanyasin gain, which can not be secured by other ways of life? It is well-known that an enlightened man, whatever be his Asrama, can destroy his desires, gain perfect control over body and mind, and obtain true knowledge. The beggar is as light as feather, and equally worthless. He is of no use to himself or to anyone else. Afraid not only of the strong, but even of the weak, he wanders listlessly here and there wasting all his time in idleness. How can such a fellow reach the goal of human life? It is true, a householder can not practise the divine virtues so well as a man living in a forest. Yet enlightened men are seen going about the world, untouched by the thought "I am this body", and paying no heed to physical existence, having already become one with Brahman. One may wonder why these people after giving up all thought of the body and the senses, go about like ghosts and goblins, despising the world's attraction and forming a burden to the industrious section of the population. Let the aspirant, if he is enlightened and is an earnest seeker of knowledge, leave his home, wander about or stay in monasteries or temples. If he is as afraid of the evil emotional effects of worldly contact, as deer is afraid of the hunter, if it is such weakness of the mind that drives him out of his home, is he not a coward deserving our pity? True indeed! They alone are true heroes whose minds remain unmoved even when assailed by causes of powerful emotion. "विकारहेतौ सति विक्रियन्ते येषां न चेतांसि त एव धीराः" Who can escape scalding if he touches fire? Who can escape biting if he treads on a snake? Similarly, if one meddles with sensuous pleasures, how can he escape pollution? Sensuousness is no respector of persons. It makes no difference whether the man concerned is enlightened or unenlightened.

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If persons with steady and pure minds are as liable to be carried away by worldly pleasures as the ignorant and unwise, then what is the difference between them? The very idea of a steady mind associated with a knower of Brahman, may thus appear as meaningless. A consideration of the signs of "Sthitha Prajna" (a person of steady mind) may seem to be vain. But, who can change the essential nature of things? Who can change a pot into cloth? Who can transform pleasant things that forge links of bondage into something opposite? He alone is a true Mahatma who shuns worldly pleasures like poison, who gives up all desire, who continues to perceive Truth wherever he stays or wanders and finds it in all living things, always without let or hindrance. If a man's mind remains calm and steady in the face of all provocations, if it remains cheerful and capable of attaining samadhi, if it is ever fearless, and firm, he will be different from all ordinary men even if he remains at home. Even if such marvellous yoga-bhrashtas (who have deviated from the strict path of yoga in previous births) continue to enjoy the joy of Samadhi at home. They may sometimes accept Sanyasa for Self-realization or for the protection and preservation of True knowledge. Will this method, ancient among the methods adopted in search of God and self-realization, last long in the future? It may, however, be said that even today this most glorious and solitary method of mendicancy sustaining oneself like bees on honey gathered in minute particles from numerous sources (flowers) has not gone completely out of fashion. Under the influence of this wonderful hoary tradition, many cultured persons even today give up everything, attain the stage of desirelessness, and proceed along this way of life. Whether it is useful or useless to adopt Sanyasa and go about sustaining oneself on 'bhiksha', swamiji entered upon that way of life inspired by that great ideal.

Having arrived at Rishikesh as a Sanyasin, Thyagananda sustained himself on a meal a day, getting it from some feeding house or at some other place. He passed a few days in the populous suburbs of the town and then withdrew himself to a beautiful solitary mutt two miles away called Brahmananda-

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srama, situated on the banks of the Ganga. The head of the mutt then was Swami Hridayanandaji with whom Thyagananda had struck up an acquaintance at Nasik. When he had learnt of the proposed visit to Rishikesh, Hridayanandaji had insisted upon his staying at Brahmanandasram freely as if it were his own. But Hridayanandaji himself was now away, having permanently settled down at Nasik. A Malayali swami named Narayana Puri was in charge of the Asram at Rishikesh. Narayana Puri was not particularly learned in the scriptures or Vedanta but he used to regard himself as a great scholar. There was no strain of love or humility in his composition. If, then, he welcomed Swamiji and treated him with respect and consideration it was not because of the natural suavity of his temper or because of the noble qualities associated with true sanyasin, but because Thyagananda came from his own home district and was known to be intimate with Swami Hridayanandaji. Taking up his abode in a solitary and peaceful hut, Thyagananda pursued a life of austerities and penances with greater rigour than before. Detached in spirit and indifferent to pleasure and pain alike, he passed his days there in joy. The affairs of the asram were then in disorder. No regular meals were prepared even for the Sadhus. So Thyagananda had to support himself upon food obtained either at the asram or elsewhere.

Winter was now approaching. Day by day it got more and more cold. Being a southerner, Thyagananda was not previously used to such low temperatures. By the time the Himalayan winter reached its zenith, Swamiji found himself in a quandary. His body had grown emaciated and feeble for lack of nourishment. He had no woollen clothes to protect him from the biting cold. He was therefore easily overcome by cold, even as an unarmed person is overpowered by his enemy well provided with weapons. He suffered severely. It is true, he was long accustomed to a single meal a day, but then that meal was suited to his tastes—rice and curry prepared from green vegetables and rich curd. He could not easily stomach the '*chapathis*' made of wheat flour. So he grew thinner and weaker. No wonder he suffered terribly, more terribly than

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ever before. But he put up with all the discomforts patiently and cheerfully, taking them as a necessary part of his tapasya. He never grudged nor grumbled for he had fully understood the significance of the saying "तानि वा एतानि अपराणि तपांसि । न्यासएवात्यरेचयत् ".

'Thapas' means turning pain into pleasure. Then how can one seek to remove pain? Even during that season of benumbing cold, when all the body was shivering, he used to bathe daily in the nearby Ganga. So long as he resided at Rishikesh this morning bath in the holy Ganga, went on unhindered.

A Sanyasin can not afford to be idle. He must be always on the alert and his life must be full of suitable activity. It must serve as an ideal to all mankind. Otherwise, it can do no good; it will become despicable here as well as elsewhere. Convinced of this truth as a result of long and anxious thinking, he lost no time in drawing up a time-table to be followed every day. He followed it rigorously but also cheerfully, Being eager to amass fresh knowledge he had included the study of religious books as an item of his daily programme. Fortunately in a library close-by, founded as a memorial to late Swami Sri Rama Theertha, he came across a fine collection of religious and philosophical volumes. He took them out and read them, concentrating his mind with student-like attention. In the course of his five or six years' stay at Rishikesh he thus read every book in the library that was worth reading. He exhausted all spiritual books written in Sanskrit, English or Hindi. These included treatises on Buddhist, Jaina, Christian and other religions. They helped to develop his mind and widen his outlook. The study of books dealing with religions other than one's own helps to dispel the erroneous view that the reader's own religion is the only true religion. He became conversant with the different systems of philosophy obtaining in different parts of the world.

Partly for physical exercise and partly for the enjoyment of Nature's beauty, even at home he had made it a part of his routine to go out on evening rambles. He did not break this

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custom even in Rishikesh and other Himalayan regions. On one such walk along the bank of the Ganga, he came across Sri Raghavacharya who was instructing his disciples in Vedanta, in a school on the side of the path. Sri Raghavacharya was a great scholar and head of the school. He belonged to the Visishtadvaita Cult. On catching sight of Swamiji he invited Swamiji to the school and offering him a seat of honour entered into conversation with him. Evidently, his object was to test Swamiji's learning and at the same time display his own erudition.

Pundit.—Do you know Sanskrit?

Swamiji, who was not yet well conversant with Hindi, replied in Sanskrit, " A little ".

Slightly surprised at this reply in Sanskrit, the Pundit fixed his gaze on Swamiji and said, " You know Sanskrit well. In which of the scriptures have you specialised yourself?"

" Nothing in particular. I have only a general knowledge of the various systems and am still trying to acquire more."

Pundit.—What are the authorities on which Sanyasins with close shaven heads rely to establish that Brahman is without attributes and that one can secure Liberation by a sheer understanding of the Mahavakyas?

Swamiji.—Of course, there are the Srutis, anumana (inference) etc., in evidence.

Pundit.—How can illusion of the nature of darkness, find a place in Brahman which is of the nature of light?

Swamiji.—How can there be the dark shadow in the bright moon?

The Pundit now contemptuously advanced argument after argument to demolish the concept of Brahman without attributes and Swamiji met them four square, one after another, by sheer force of logic. As it was getting dark Swamiji got up and without waiting for the Pundit's permission bade him goodbye and set out for his own hut. At another time, on the same spot, they held a longer discussion on the scriptures. Since then they happened to meet again and again at different places and discuss the Vedanta philosophy with the result the two became fast friends. Their friendship never suffered a

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set back. Swamiji used to recollect their relation with pleasure. So long as he stayed at Rishikesh, he took delight in visiting the school.

During the first year of his sojourn, Swamiji studied "Khandana Khandakhadya" a higher book on Vedanta, for a few days with a few companions. Several men of learning were delighted to render service to Swamiji during his stay there. At this time he came across a Sadhu who used to lie on the scorching sand and rock glowing in the hot sunshine of the Vaisakha (April–May) afternoons. Sometimes the sadhu got up suddenly and galloped away like a horse. His body was as tough as steel and his behaviour was highly eccentric. Thyagananda who was an adept in testing the character of sadhus, one day went to him and reverentially prostrating himself before him saluted him with the usual words "Om namo Narayanaya!". The sadhu simply looked into his face and said nothing. Then with all humility Thyagananda asked him "Sir, what are you doing here in this hot noon?"

Sadhu.—Brahman.

Swamiji.—Where do you stay?

Sadhu.—Brahman.

Swamiji.—Would you kindly tell me of the experiences you have gained by this arduous penance?

Sadhu.—Brahman.

Swamiji wondered at the reiterated answer "Brahman" "Brahman" to every question and desired to spend some time with the Mahatma but unable to endure the terrible heat on the red-hot rock, quickly prostrated himself before him and returned. Once more he saw the Sadhu in the precincts of the asram. He was then swallowing the sweet meats put into his mouth by his devotees. Suddenly he jumped up and ran away. Swamiji learnt from other sanyasins that the 'Sadhu' was one who had practised 'pranayana' and other processes of Hathhayoga for a very long period. He possessed wonderful powers of endurance (thithiksha) etc., and was an 'Avadhoota' without a fixed abode. People called him "Brahmam". Swamiji happened to meet him again and again. They got on as intimate friends, though he never spoke to him.

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During Swamiji's stay at Brahmanandasrama, he got acquainted with several Paramahamsa sanyasins of Kailas Mutt. He spent much time in friendly discussion with them. Among the Sanyasins he met there one who deserves special mention—the young but scholarly Mandaleswar, Sri Swami Vishnu Devananda.

Having become a member of the brotherhood of sanyasins he now began to associate himself closely with other sanyasins. Such association gradually unfolded to him the weaknesses and eccentricities of many of the members of his class. Generalising from his experience at Rishikesh, he learnt how scarce are true sanyasins in the world—sanyasins worth the name, Sanyasins rich in the possession of divine qualities. Forests upon forests we have, but not all of them contain sandalwood trees! Some sanyasins are profound in their knowledge of Sanskrit, some in English, some are 'awadhutas' who have given up even their clothing; there are others proud of their peculiar Order, pluming themselves upon the colour and cut of their robes. There are multitudes of idle men and women donning the Sanyasin's garb, but without even a smattering of education or culture. They know nothing of God, nothing of spiritual exercises. It is these fellows who lead licentious lives, consuming intoxicants and breaking all the rules and vows of Sanyasa, that prove as destructive as atom bombs to their own community. How few are the true Sanyasins who shun external pleasures and practise self-restraint and of the mind, tranquillity and devotion, who possess knowledge of the Eternal Truth, and find the Self in everything! If the number of such saints and knowers of Brahman is so small even in a place like Rishikesh reputed to be the abode of such Mahatmas, how can we expect to find them in larger numbers an where else? It is easy to pretend that one has attained the lofty heights of yoga, that one has immersed oneself in Brahman, that one is drunk with Divine love, that one is living upon fruits and leaves only, that one can work miracles with powers attained through the practice of yoga. It is all easy indeed, but it is not so easy to become truly what they pretend themselves to be. Thyagananda realised this through his association with sanyasins who

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tried to support their tall claims with their dress, language etc. "In the Himalayan forests adepts in yoga and knowledge will be as plenty as black berries. By getting into their company one can easily become a siddha, even as the turbid waters of the sewers get purified and holy by mixing with the waters of the Ganga." Thyagananda had started with such fond hopes. He now found that such hopes were dupes. He even began to wonder what these Sanyasins, who had sacrificed the comforts of their homes, given up the activities relating to this world as well as to the other world, and withdrawn themselves into the forest to live upon the earnings of other people, could achieve in the spiritual sphere that could not be achieved by worthy house-holders attending to their worldly duties and at the same time sincerely practising spiritual discipline for realizing God. Such thoughts began to trouble him. But now let us resume the story.

At Rishikesh, Thyagananda passed five or six months, as quickly as if they were so many minutes. Then summer came. The Himalayan valley, shut in by high mountains on all sides, proved even more hot than Kerala or other regions of the South. The atmosphere was not breezy and day by day heat was on the increase. It was growing unbearable. Partly to escape from such intense heat, partly to satisfy his natural longing to visit the lovely Himalayan uplands (for Swamiji was ever fond of beautiful landscapes) and partly out of the desire to practise spiritual discipline in those lovely peaceful solitudes, he decided to travel Northward that year itself, towards holy temples like Uttarkasi, Gangotri, Jumnotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath etc. But he was not unmindful of difficulties. He did not know the regional languages he was unskilled in the art of procuring bhiksha, he lacked money and there was none to help him.

The way was long and difficult and risky. But what is there beyond the reach of the industrious? "किं दूरं व्यवसायिनां" He did not alter his decision to travel North that year itself.

At this time, one day Swamiji remembered his brother at home. He must be sad and depressed, he thought, because

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of his separation from his loving brother. To console him and encourage him in the discharge of his duties, Swamiji decided to send him a letter. An educated Brahmacharin who was then with him took it down from dictation. "Don't allow yourself to be saddened or discouraged by your separation from Swamiji. Be courageous and cheerful. Preserve your mental peace. Swamiji here is in the best of health and spirits. He intends to go to Badrinath, before long. May goddess Bhagirathi bless you!" For fear of receiving a reply, Swamiji deliberately omitted giving his address.

While Swamiji was thus getting ready to travel to Badrinath, Sri Raghavacharya who had, by this time, become a close friend, presented him with a small sum of money and persuaded him to accept it. Besides, he managed to secure for Swamiji from the Kali Kambli Walla temple various facilities for travel, unavailable to common sadhus.

On an auspicious day, in the company of two other sanyasins from the South, Swamiji set out for Badrinath via Mussori.

The inner regions of the Himalayas is a strange and beautiful country. Here and there are villages inhabited by mountain folk wearing strange clothes and talking strange jargons. Here and there are formidable forests haunted by ferocious wild beasts. Silvery streams coming down the steep mountains add to the beauty of the landscape. Catching sight of the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas from a distance Swamiji had forgetten all about the Earth inhabited by man. He felt as if he had been bodily lifted up into some region in heaven where peace reigned supreme. Gigantic trees and small shrubs creepers and climbers, grass and herbs as well as crows, starks, cuckoos doves, cows, horses, dogs etc., etc., all previously familiar to him now afforded him ineffable joy. The fresh and boundless beauty of the Himalayan region filled his mind at every step with thoughts on the greatness and glory of the creator. In that sublime state of the mind he covered the ninety miles from Rishikesh to Uttarkasi in a few days in spite of the difficulties along the route. Here no attempt is made to describe Uttarkasi as it would be sheer repetition; for Swamiji has described the holy temples of that place and elsewhere in the Northern regions

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in his Malayalam book Himagiri Vihar, in language replete with spirituality. That book, published by Sahityakusala Sri T. K. Krishna Menon, himself an author of several books in English as well as Malayalam, has met with wide appreciation.* Certain scholars engaged in historical research hold that the place described in the Kedarakhanda of Skanda Purana as Soumya Kasi is neither so ancient nor so historical as Banaras (Varanasi in the East). Yet it has been included in the Puranas in spite of his modernity because of its glorious reputation. They also quote authorities to prove their contention. Some people look upon Uttarkasi as the peaceful and undisturbed abode of the dispassionate, ascetics. Others, devoid of faith, look down upon it has the dormitory of the slothful vagrants who have neither education nor culture and yet put on the ochre-coloured robes as a passport to a life of ignoble ease—a sort of undesirable people whose number is going up, by leaps and bounds, year after year. Notwithstanding such conflicting views Swamiji is all admiration for the holy place washed by the sacred waters of the Ganga. In his beautiful hymn " Soumya Kaseesa Stotra " he has described the place with implicit faith and devotion. (P. 37)

" Soumya Kasi is bounded by two rivers, the Varuna and the Asi. It is ten square miles in extent. It is situated in the valley of the great mountain, Varanavatha. Here the Ganga, with her gentle ripples, is ever producing the sweet music of the Sama Veda. Sri Viswanatha to whom this hymn is addressed and whom the Sanyasins who have conquered all desires realize here through severe 'tapas', blesses this place with His presence."

At Uttarkasi there is a branch of the Kailas Mutt of Rishikesh belonging to the Sri Sankara Order of Sanyasins. As the manager of the local Mutt had been instructed from Rishikesh he received Swamiji respectfully and entertained him hospitably. " It will be bitterly cold if you go higher up just now; so stay here for a few days until the weather improves and then you

* The book has since been translated into English by the translator of this book under the title " Wanderings in the Himalayas " and published by Sri Chinmaya Trust.

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can proceed". Such was the advice Swamiji received from Sri Swami Sankaramandaji and other elderly sanyasins. He accepted the well-meant advice and stayed at the Asram for a few days. Uttarkasi is beautiful and peaceful and hence fit for the abode of people who seek peace, not for people who love Rajasik pleasures. People, predominantly Rajasik or Tamasik by nature, will find it impossible to get on here. The auspicious spot afforded great joy to Swamiji's mind. Then and there he resolved to return to it shortly to spend a much longer time in the place enjoying its spiritual atmosphere. Many sanyasins staying in Kailas Mutt or outside, now met the new sanyasin and though he was not yet enough conversant with Hindi to answer their questions in that language, plied him with all types of questions: "Which is your native district? Are you a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin? What is the name you have adopted as a Sanyasin? Do you know Sanskrit? Have you studied the scriptures?" and so on. At Rishikesh too, he had been pestered in time and out of time with similar questions by persons who had put on the ochre-coloured robe. It was mostly uncultured fellows who were so inquisitive and impertinent. indeed, good people are like bees which visit flowers to gather sweet honey. The attempt of the really good ones is to find the good in other people; on the contrary, the bad ones, like cocks on a dunghill searching for worms and other prey, revel in other peoples' defects and weaknesses. They do not find greater joy in the birth of a son than in the discovery of some defect in their neighbours. Because wicked people are far more numerous in our world than good ones, we find a very large number of carping critics and fault-finders around us. Why wonder at it? It is a subject to ponder over whether these people who work hard to discover other people's faults and in case they fail to find them, rack their brains to invent them and father them upon others, are really virtuous or essentially wicked. Well, let us leave it at that. To the question what Swamiji's yogic title was, this was his answer: "It was from H. H. Swami Santyananda Saraswati that he had received 'Brahmavidyopadesa'" (instruction in supreme Truth) and though his holiness had not formally initiated him

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into sanyasa, he could very well style himself as "Saraswati" after his guru, if he so desired. At these words a Dandi Sanyasi, dark in complexion and very old, who knew nothing of the scriptures and yet was inordinately proud of being a Brahmin, like a disturbed mating cobra, flared up and began to pour down vile, poisonous abuse upon Swamiji, "What do you mean? By what right can a fellow, who is neither a Brahmin nor a Dandi, assume the title "Saraswati"? Alas! Alas! all the old and noble rules relating to Varnasrama dharma are dead now! Stark dead! Any body and everybody is free in these days wantonly to do or misdo whatever one likes" so on and so forth. He looked as angry as one whose paternal property had been trespassed upon and misappropriated by some body. In his eyes anybody, other than a Dandi Sanyasin who dared to take up the title "Saraswati" was a terrible sinner deserving of condign chastisement and reprobation. Swamiji at once understood his point of view and fully knowing how thankless it was to argue with such uneducated persons wasted no breath in debate. He sat only smiling in absolute silence. Now, let us examine this matter a little.

"Some people are good and noble by birth; others are born wicked and ignoble, who must live all their lives in disgrace objects of contempt and ridicule. The Creator himself is responsible for such a division of society! Such an erroneous view has been prevailing among fools in the world for a long, long time. "We alone can lay down rules of conduct, all others must unquestioningly obey us like the four footed cattle. It is our birth right to rule and enforce discipline. "This is the view of fools" I alone aim to enjoy; all others are to be enjoyed. They must be thankful if I enjoy them. Knowledge and fame and all the good things of the world are mine—mine alone". So long as this view of the fishes prevail, we can not expect equality of treatment; we can not expect all persons to reach the same state of education or enlightenment. So long as women are denied equality with men, so long as women are treated as inferior to them, so long as fools bear the palm, how can there be feelings of fraternity and friendship? Children are born into this hell-like world of poverty and ignorance to

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die there like flies. Nobody bothers about the amelioration of their condition. What a pity! If anybody tries to save them from their misery and lift them out of their abject state, Brahmins dub him as an outcaste living beyond the pale of dharma. In their view those who honestly try with manly courage to put an end to the folly and laziness characteristic of outcastes, are sinners; those who tamely submit to and follow the out-moded and reprehensible customs and manners of their caste are ideal men and women! Wonder of wonders! If this is the real nature of Sanatana dharma, how can it be sanatana (eternal, everlasting)? Humanity is essentially one and indivisible. Who will not wish to destroy these artificial rules and customs that cut up humanity into tiny little bits? Only what will last through all ages, prevail in all parts of the world and be acceptable to all communities ensuring progress, prosperity and happiness to them, can be truly Sanatana. All else, that divide people and people, and create ill will and rivalry at different times and in different places can never be Sanatana.

Then what is Sanatana dharma? Swamiji has dealt with this subject in his own book "Ganga Stotra". "Men who have no faith do not consider the good or the bad aspect of things. They do not think even about themselves. From the well dug by ancestors they drink the brine, because the well had been sunk by their ancestors. O great and supremely beautiful Ganga, to reach you is to attain all divine qualities and godhood.

The divine qualities are the means and godhood is the end. In my view these are the Sanatana dharma, nothing else. That dharma which remains homogeneous, and unchanging in all good persons and in all good affairs irrespective of time and place alone is Sanatana dharma; everything else is unessential, unimportant. O Goddess whose form is the Supreme Self, realization of Thyself is the Supreme object human life. It is with this goal before them that people act with due reverence to time and place. That is the true dharma; it is they who perform that dharma that follow the pure and eternal dharma."

After spending two or three weeks at Uttarkasi, Thyagananda set out for Gangotri. Upon the trek up the

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mountains, he had a Namboodiri youngman from Kerala for his companion. The youth was a brahmacharin. His arrival was purely accidental.

How beautiful is Himavan! It is matchless and is simply wonderful. Chains of high mountains, forests thick and extensive, limpid, blue streams that join the Ganga on her course, the famous Rishikunda, Gowrikunda near Kedarnath, Taptakunda, the hot water lake near Badrinath—all fascinated him. These astonishing sights unseen before, filled him with pleasure. At last he arrived at the source of the Ganga who is believed to issue forth from the holy feet of Lord Vishnu. A drop of the Ganga water, the Hindus believe, will wash away all the sins accumulated through series of lives and qualify the sinner for heaven. Thyagananda stayed a week at Gangotri enjoying the Supermundane beauty of the place and the spiritual magnificence of the region. In that holy land of solitude and tranquillity he performed the various sadhanas such as ceremonial bath, worship, meditation and singing of hymns. He felt as if his life's purpose was thus fulfilled.

Thyagananda's next objective was Kedarnath. On the way he visited the two famous temples Vridha Kedarnath and Thriyugeenarayanam. To reach Kedarnath he had to cross the high mountain Pass Pawali. Snow covered peaks towering into the sky, valleys covered with forests, ringing with the songs and sounds of multifarious birds and beasts, etc., roused his curiosity and engrossed his interest. Enjoying the loveliness of the landscapes, with immense faith and curiosity he at last reached the Kedarnath Temple. There he saw close by a lovely silvery peak of the Himalayas towering up into the sky. The sight filled him with extra-mundane joy. His mind transcended all distinctions of the knower and the known and entered into a sublime mood of ineffable joy. After a bath in the river, worship at the temple, etc., he went to a small but beautiful lake called Chourwadi. The way was difficult to traverse but at last he reached his destination. The shores of the lake were covered with big boulders of ice which looked like herds of white elephants come to slake their thirst at the lake. There was another lake called Vasuki at some distance. For lack of

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a guide Swamiji could not visit it. His next object was Badrikasram, standing on the bank of the Alakananda, famous in the Puranas as the holy abode of the great Rishis. On the way he passed through several villages big and small, and forests dark and forbidding. He traversed hills and hillocks, visited Guptakasi, Ukhimadhom (Ushamadhom) Tunganath, Jyothirmutt and other famous centres of pilgrimage and at last arrived at Badari.

Badari shines like a Sandal mark on the broad forehead of the Divine Himavan, whose lovely peaks like Sumeru, Gourisankar and Kailas are the sporting grounds of the Lord. It is a charming spot consecrated by the 'tapasya' performed here by great Rishis like Nara, Narayana, Vyasa and Suka. Thyagananda felt that only the merits earned in previous lives had enabled him to reach the sacred place. With great faith he washed himself in the holy waters of the famous Taptakunda and worshipped at the temple. As befits sanyasins he paid visits also to Brahmakapali and other sacred spots. He spent a day at the guest-house of a priest. Fearing that it would not be monetarily advantageous to entertain a Sanyasin, the priest sent him away the next morning. So Swamiji had to pass the remaining days elsewhere. Alas! this is what you experience wherever there is a pilgrim spot in India, whether in villages or in cities. Brahminical qualities like physical and mental control, spirit of sacrifice and penance, worldly and spiritual knowledge have been replaced by greed, pride, arrogance and similar traits of the Age of Kali. On a comparison of what was with what is, Swamiji felt depressed and surprised.

Swamiji did not stay long at Badari. He shortly started on his return journey. His companion, the brahmacharin, was exhausted with walking. So Swamiji had to leave him behind and go back all alone. He was as unskilled in asking for food as in cooking. So on that long and difficult journey he had to be content with whatever he got without asking for it. One day, at noon, he was resting at a village temple on an empty stomach. A Vaishnava Sadhu, as black as a crow outside but with a heart as white as the swan, noticed how famished and tired Swamiji was, obtained some wheat flour from a generous

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traveller and began to cook it in a corner. A Brahmin in the middle of life, who was engaged in cooking his food nearly got up in disgust, and approaching the Sadhu in a fury began to thunder at him, "You, low-born fellow, to which Order of sanyasin do you belong? What is your caste? You wear no sacred thread. How do you then dare cook food for others? Get away! What! Are all the traditions of Sanatana dharma, all the rules relating to what is edible and inedible, gone clean overboard? Run! run! Run off at once! How can a sanyasin receive food at your hands?" All people within hearing were taken aback by the torrent of such abusive language. Swamiji who was at some distance, too, heard these words and was pained. He at once walked up to the demoniac Brahmin and began to soothe him: "After all, you are a sanyasin. Why do you get so cross with a fellow sanyasin? What has he done to deserve such chastisement? This God-like Vaishnava sadhu found me starving and if he therefore decided to cook some food for me also, how does he offend you? Your arrogance goes beyond bounds. It is for me to determine whether I should accept food at his hands or not—not for you. It is none of your concern. He has had his bath and is clean. If he prepares food in a clean way I have no objection to eat it. It was with my permission that he started to prepare food. Why do you meddle with this matter? In determining your dharma, you have, of course full freedom; in determining mine I have as much freedom as you. Being uneducated you do not, perhaps, realise that." Such words of Swamiji, instead of sobering or mollifying him, only added to his fury. "Paramahamsas like you who set all the rules of dharma at naught are an ornament to this Kali Yuga!" he roared. Then rushing to the 'Sadhu' who was still cooking, he began to pur down vile abuse upon him with redoubled vigour. The peaceful Sadhu, unable to stand such abuse, gave up cooking and went away. "Alas! This fellow has driven away that poor but faithful sadhu. Perhaps this Defender of Sanatana dharma, this eloquent exponent of the true dharma, will provide me with food, seeing how hungry I have been" thought our Swamiji. But without wasting a thought upon the hunger striken Sanyasin who was

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seated close, without giving him even a single morsel, the orthodox Brahmin gentleman swallowed all the food he had prepared. Swamiji could not but marvel at the practical demonstration of the Brahmin's religiosity, his modern interpretation of Sanatana dharma! Sorely hungry he slowly got up and moved away. In the evening at some distant resting house he got some food offered to him with devotion. Only then was his hunger satisfied. Swamiji experienced many such hardships and privations on the way but the enterprising spirit of Swamiji could not be cowed down. He visited all the holy places of pilgrimage like the Pancha Prayag and reached Rishikesh from Badri in twelve days. There were still a few days to "Guru Poornima". He was once more at Brahmananda Mutt where he had stayed before and which was most suited to a Sanyasin's life.

Compared with the aged sanyasins, Swamiji was almost a novice. But by his strict adherence to the Sanyasin-like qualities of self-control (both mental and physical) piety, and continued pursuit of the arduous path of dispassion, he had already established himself as any of his elders. He always asked himself "What am I gaining by accepting Sanyasa and withdrawing into the Himalayan regions, that I could not have gained at home?" With deep faith he held his mind ever under control and made good progress towards his goal. Certainly, it is possible for a householder, courageous and generous, wise and discriminating, to engage himself in spiritual Sadhanas even in the midst of domestic and social duties and meditate upon God, provided he has conquered his senses. Yet, he cannot concentrate his mind upon God and God only all his waking hours and that is why a sanyasin is superior to a householder.

It may be contented that people in other Asramas, also, if they are rich in the fourfold Sadhanas (accomplishment), can engage themselves with concentration upon constant meditation, dissemination of truth etc., as well as any Sanyasin. It may be so, we do not question. We may even accept without objections if some one says that it is cowards and ordinary men who are lacking the Sadhanas, that withdraw into the forest recesses for fear of being drawn into the vortex of worldliness

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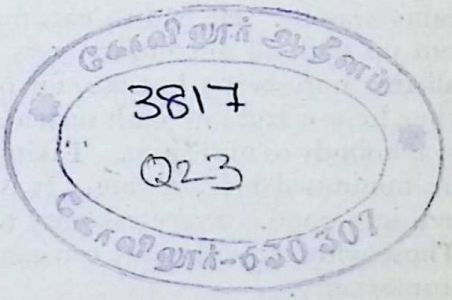
and subjected to mental disturbances. If Sanyasins have a right to warn those heroic people who remain at home and take part in worldly affairs, to be careful, and not to be misled by tempting sensuous charms, active men have a similar right to remind Sanyasins who pride themselves upon being perfectly free from obligations of duty and require only food and clothing, not to let themselves lapse into the well of laziness.



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CHAPTER 3

During the rainy season the trees, creepers, climbers and even thickets in the forests of Rishikesh grow luxuriantly and appear enchantingly beautiful putting on tender leaves and flowers. Everywhere there is greenery. Its divine beauty charms eyes as well as hearts. Words are then powerless to describe the beauty of Nature. But our young Sanyasin was not destined to drink in the nectar of that boundless loveliness, because he was stricken down with malarial fever that usually harasses this forest belt during the Chaturmasya period (the rainy season). He had to pass many days in bed. He had to put up with all discomforts very patiently. His suffering was all the more better because, for one thing, it was for the first time he was laid low with such a disease, and for another, there was nobody to nurse him. Taking it as another form of ' tapas ' he minimised his suffering. It is possible to transform every evil into good. Every calamity tends to our future prosperity. Those who know the way can convert poison into the nectar of immortality.

"दुःखं यद्यदनुप्राप्तं तपोरूपेण भावयेत् ।
तर्हि दुःखं न दुःखाय स्यादिति श्रुतिमातृगीः ॥"

" Whatever sorrow comes, take it as tapasya because Mother Veda says that sorrow does not happen for sorrow." It was Swamiji's custom to take every sorrow or sickness that came as a blessing of God and put up with it without excitement or feelings of revenge. Among the faithful who have surrendered themselves completely to God and who live upon the love of God, such conduct is nothing extraordinary.

At Rishikesh he thus passed two months from the middle of July to the middle of September in painful fever. By October he recovered and gradually gained strength enough to perform his duties. Strongly established in the Sanyasin's way of life, repeat at time Sri Sankaracharya's Sivanandalahari Stotram to the sanyasin who nursed him. In the recital of such stotrams the southerners in general and Malayalees in

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particular are skilled owning to tradition but Swamiji's recital with faith attention and humility filled the hearer with joy.

The rainy season came to an end and the sky shone clear dark blue like collyrium. Sanyasins came out of their hermitages to go out on their wanderings. The happy and auspicious days of Durga worship approached. But, all on a sudden, all unexpectedly, the Ganga caused a terrible havoc. All people were plunged into sorrow. As a result of the heavy rains extending over a number of days the stream was in spate. The mighty stream corroded the banks and swallowed up the hermitage and Mutts built upon them. Several Sanyasins were, all at once, emancipated from their mortal existence. Even those who enjoyed Supreme Peace were moved to grief by this unprecedented calamity. Swamiji alone, remembering the unsubstantial nature of worldly existence with its fleeting joys and sorrows, misfortunes and good fortunes, births and deaths and the eternal, unchanging nature of Self, viewed all this calamity as a sort of diversion. Watching in open-eyed wonder the roaring waves striking against the mountain rocks he thought of the irresistible might of God with devotion.

It was now his second winter at Rishikesh. The second was worse than the first, yet it was far more conducive to mental peace and the practice of Samadhi. When he arrived the Mahant or Head of Brahmanandasrama was a sanyasin from the South. For some reason he was removed from his office and so the office was now vacant. Swami Paramanandagiri who was looking after the Asrama was the head of the neighbouring Kailasasrama as well. Whenever he saw Swami Thyagananda, he would say, "It was a stroke of good luck that a learned sanyasin like you took up your residence here. The conditions in this Asrama are now bordering on anarchy. If you accept the office of the Mahant you can save it from chaos and ruin. If you agree, all arrangements will be shortly made to install you in the office". To this loving and at the same pressing request, Swamiji, with folded hands and all humility would at once reply, "I haven't the qualifications to hold such high office. Moreover I have no natural liking for such worldly activities. Besides, how can I discharge the duties as Head of

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CHAPTER 3

During the rainy season the trees, creepers, climbers and even thickets in the forests of Rishikesh grow luxuriantly and appear enchantingly beautiful putting on tender leaves and flowers. Everywhere there is greenery. Its divine beauty charms eyes as well as hearts. Words are then powerless to describe the beauty of Nature. But our young Sanyasin was not destined to drink in the nectar of that boundless loveliness, because he was stricken down with malarial fever that usually harasses this forest belt during the Chaturmasya period (the rainy season). He had to pass many days in bed. He had to put up with all discomforts very patiently. His suffering was all the more better because, for one thing, it was for the first time he was laid low with such a disease, and for another, there was nobody to nurse him. Taking it as another form of 'tapas' he minimised his suffering. It is possible to transform every evil into good. Every calamity tends to our future prosperity. Those who know the way can convert poison into the nectar of immortality.

"दुःखं यद्यदनुप्राप्तं तपोरूपेण भावयेत् ।
तर्हि दुःखं न दुःखाय स्यादिति श्रुतिमातृगीः ॥"

"Whatever sorrow comes, take it as tapasya because Mother Veda says that sorrow does not happen for sorrow." It was Swamiji's custom to take every sorrow or sickness that came as a blessing of God and put up with it without excitement or feelings of revenge. Among the faithful who have surrendered themselves completely to God and who live upon the love of God, such conduct is nothing extraordinary.

At Rishikesh he thus passed two months from the middle of July to the middle of September in painful fever. By October he recovered and gradually gained strength enough to perform his duties. Strongly established in the Sanyasin's way of life, repeat at time Sri Sankaracharya's Sivanandalahari Stotram to the sanyasin who nursed him. In the recital of such stotrams the southerners in general and Malayalees in

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particular are skilled owning to tradition but Swamiji's recital with faith attention and humility filled the hearer with joy.

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the Mutt, seeing that I know neither the regional dialect nor the local customs?"

Swamiji was perfectly well convinced that he could meditate upon Brahman wherever he be—whether at Rishikesh or elsewhere. Moreover he was actuated by a desire to enjoy the Natural beauty of the Himalayan lands capes and to go wandering in those divine regions. He therefore decided to go to Nepal and participate in the famous Sivarathri festival at Pasupathinath. But a journey to the temple was found to be difficult until weather grew more warm. It was while he was thus biding his time, he got an opportunity to meet his Guru, Sri Jagadguru Swami Santyananda Saraswati. He had come to the Himalayas to preside over a meeting of Advaitins held annually once in Kailasasram. Sri Jagadguru's heart was full of natural love. When unexpectedly his eyes fell upon Thyagananda with his clean shaven head and ochre-coloured robes, he was moved not a little. Suddenly he asked "When did you take to these robes?" "It is more than a year since", replied Swamiji. Sri Jagadguru was visibly affected by the reply. For a few moments he could neither speak nor question. His eyes were brimming with tears; his shining face faded away. Who will not be moved on seeing a loving, good and noble friend suddenly turned into a mendicant, a 'bhikshu?' Shri Jagadguru's mind was brave and dispassionate, but it was also too tender to brook other people's sufferings and too full of the milk of human kindness. So he could not gain self control for a moment. Does not a flower fade if the dry grass catches fire somewhere in the neighbourhood? But the excitement was momentary. He was a knower of Brahman, steadfast in mind and discriminating by practice. So he soon restrained his feelings and regained himself. Some times as we walk, our foot trips or slips for the fraction of a second. Similar was the momentary emotional upset of the Jagadguru.

In a voice full of love and regard His Holiness continued his conversation in Sanskrit: "What arrangements have you made for 'bhiksha?' (food) "Just the common one" replied Swamiji, "For Sanyasins, is not seeking bhiksha, the means of

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livelihood? However, for the present, I get my meals from the asram where I stay."

H. H.—Alas! Why don't you make some special arrangements for bhiksha? Why should you weaken your body living upon unnourishing food? If you desire to become a sanyasin, all right, become one. But can you sustain your life like beggars upon food obtained by begging?

Swamiji.—Having given up everything worldly and become a sanyasin how can I indulge in 'Rajasik' ways?

With such enquiries and answers they parted on the first day. Since then they met everyday and discussed at length matters material as well as spiritual. His Holiness took great delight in going out on evening walks in the company of his disciple. One evening His Holiness came to Brahmanandasram where Swamiji was then staying and from the Manager learnt how the 'asrama' was being run. Before leaving the 'asram' Sri Jagadguru out of love for his disciple told the Manager: "This Sanyasin (Swamiji) is no ordinary one and should not be neglected. You ought to treat him with love and respect, and meet all his needs with special consideration". The other sanyasins living in the neighbourhood now realized that the young 'sadhu' so respected and extolled by such an august personage as His Holiness Sri Jagadguru, must be no common bhikshu and so began to treat him with greater attention and humility and show more love and respect in talk and conduct. Only so long as a Sanyasin's merits remain unknown can he enjoy supreme peace and flawless Divine joy; once the public learn of his greatness, and he becomes a popular figure it is impossible for him to enjoy such peace or joy. A Sanyasin who knows this truth never lets his great qualities be known to the public. Yet, Sanyasins who pass their days in mountain caves like wild bears shunning all publicity, if they are devoid of great qualities, gain celebrity in unexpected ways by a stroke of Divine dispensation. On the contrary, people of great merit living in the midst of society are found to pass their days unsung, unhonoured, unknown, like frogs living under the soil—This too is a common phenomenon.

One day while Swamiji was accompanying His Holiness

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on the usual evening ramble, he broached his idea of a proposed journey: "I desire to visit Pasupatinath at the time of the next Sivarathri festival, and so wish to set out for Khatmandu shortly." His Holiness joyfully replied, "We too have never been to Pasupatinath before. Let it be done this year. Fortunately we have nothing serious to attend to just now. We are not pressed for time. The time is therefore suited to us as well. Today we are proceeding to Hardwar on business. We shall have to stay there two or three days. By that time you must also arrive there. We shall collect all the things necessary for the mountain trek and start at an auspicious hour" Swamiji bowed to his Guru's will and agreed to do so.

Out of affectionate solicitude the Malayalee sanyasins in the asram as well as those outside, tried to dissuade Swamiji from the venture by describing the risks and sufferings involved in the proposed pilgrimage. Their warnings were, of course, worth consideration but Swamiji paid no heed to them. He set out all alone for H. H. Swami Santyananda Saraswati's asram at Hardwar. The day after his arrival at the asram His Holiness and Swamiji were discussing their pilgrimage when a Dandiswami came to them to pay his respects to the Jagadguru. During Thyagananda's first visit to Rishikesh as a 'brahmacharin' he had met the same Dandiswami at a hermitage where Thyagananda was lodging with a sadhu from Dravida Pradesh. As soon as the Dandi's eyes fell upon Swamiji he began to speak in arrogance. "This Swami (Thyagananda) is learned and good natured but he is not a Brahmin. I wonder how your Holiness got acquainted with him and have come to treat him as a friend." Those insulting words were unbecoming in the mouth of any gentleman and before the speaker could conclude His Holiness cut in with all the skill of a learned lawyer "We are not of course, ignorant of the fact that Swamiji is by birth a nonbrahmin. But our conviction, born out of long acquaintance with him, is that he is a Brahmin among Brahmins. Such is his true Brahmanya. As people like you carry your 'dandas' (sticks indicating that the bearer is a Brahmin of the fourth order) people roughly guess that you are Brahmins. How can we know of your character? For a long time we have

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known the noble history of this Sanyasin and of his sterling qualities. Besides, being natives of the same regions we know all about his birth, his native place, age, community, etc., etc. I am sorry you cannot cheat me with your allegations". The Dandiswami was abashed to hear this answer. He hung down his head in shame. Leaving aside his jealousy and slanderous disposition he began to converse on other subjects.

Preparations for the pilgrimage were completed when, all unexpectedly, His Holiness received an urgent telegram from his disciples requesting him to return to them at once for some consultation. The great Jagadguru was in a dilemma. In a tone of disappointment he then told Swamiji "You see how unfortunate we, Heads of Mutts, are! Of course, householders too are unfortunate who labour under the heavy weight of worldly duties. They are just like the bullocks who can hardly walk for their heavy burden they have to bear. Unlike us you are lucky. Start for Pasupathinath tomorrow itself. I too shall start for my destination. For some distance we can keep company in the train: You must accept from us enough money for your travelling expenses. Needn't be overscrupulous about that'. Accordingly next day both set out by train from Hardwar. For some distance they travelled together and when the time came to part, Swamiji respectfully took leave of his guru and proceeded along another direction. His Holiness had repeatedly and lovingly urged him to accept money and other things for the journey, and Swamiji respectfully declined to receive them. As he feared that it might damage his spirit of dispassion and because he found no use for money and such things he only replied that he wanted only His Holiness' blessings and nothing more. "Finish your pilgrimage quickly and successfully and return to Dwaraka or wherever we then happen to be. You can reside there freely observing the rules of a Sanyasin's life without excitement or disturbances". Such were the parting words of the Jagadguru ringing with sincerity and feeling. But alas! this was the last meeting between the Guru and the disciple. Not long after they parted, His Holiness attained Mahasamadhi. Ever afterwards Swamiji sadly used to reflect that they had no chance to meet again.

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He who has realized the Self is steeped in the thought of Self. He experiences the bliss of Self which has no beginning or end. This fourth stage without pain or the three kinds of sorrows, is not fit for wordly activity; it is a state that produces supreme peace. If one's engagement in worldly activities does not destroy or affect in whatever degree one's thought of Self, his action for the good of the world will not affect him adversely. If 'mahatmas' have to suffer distractions for the good of others, they must bear it. Trees protect men from heat with their shade. Even so 'mahatmas' should suffer pain for others' sake. They will always be ready to do so. That adds to the greatness and to the beauty of their lives.

After nine hours' train journey Swamiji alighted at Lucknow. He passed a night in the same temple as that in which he had stayed during his first visit. The Brahmin priest of the temple persuaded a rich devotee to supply swamiji with the railway fare for the next lap of the journey. Travelling by train he reached Gorakhpur. He visited the great and famous saints like Gorakhnath and prostrated himself before them. Resuming his journey he reached a smaller but rich and fertile town Veergunj. The place was crowded with men and women bound for the capital of Nepal. He joined them and proceeded on the journey. A devout householder whom he met by sheer accident prepared food for him. He also provided Swamiji with the viaticum. During the next stage of the journey he had now and then to pass through dense forests dark as night even at midday. After four days of tiring journey he at last reached the town Pasupathinath. His mind was as fresh and as vigorous as ever. On the way he came across not only men-sanyasins but also several women wearing ochre-coloured clothes.

One day, at sunset, the pilgrims, who were still on plain ground seated themselves along the road to rest for the night. Swamiji too spread his woollen rug and got ready to rest. Just then a good looking middle-aged sanyasini prostrated herself before him and said, "You are a sanyasin and Guru. I wish to fulfil the object of my life and make myself blessed by nursing your holy feet". Without a touch of bashfulness or shrinking and without waiting for Swamiji's permission she began to

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catch hold of his feet. He knew nothing of her history or character. Suddenly recollecting his duty as a sanyasin he saluted her with folded hands and respectfully said, " O mother, No, No, I do not want such comforts, Be good enough to leave me ". Speaking thus he somehow managed to send her away. Alas! In the neighbourhood of mountains in Uttar Pradesh many young windows having no place for them either in their husband's homes or in their own, are driven out into the streets in despair and sorrow to assume the garb of devotees or sanyasinis who wish to live in contact with holymen and lead the life of wanton prostitutes. It is true a few of them are really devout, working for self-realization after conquering their senses. They are worthy of the highest respect and are ornaments to this ancient land of the rishis. But most of the shiftless women leave the path of rectitude and become a source of disgrace to their society and to their country. They fall and become the cause of other peoples' fall. They pave the way to hell. This is a well known fact. Let widows stay at home or go out. It is to be sorely regretted that the merciless inflexible rules of religion are the cause of their fall into the depths of sin. Teachers of religion, proud of their Vedic love entrenching themselves behind conservatism, shut their eyes to these bitter nuisance and sufferings of helpless women. Other leaders of society being distracted by their numberless other activities, have no time to devote to the removal of such abuses. Men do not suffer half as much as by the death of their wives, as women suffer by the death of their husbands and naturally men are generally indifferent to the matter. Leaders of Hindu society ought to pay far greater attention to this question than they have yet done. Otherwise women will have to take up the matter by themselves. Let them come forward to deal with such abuses.

Swamiji prostrated himself with devotion before the five-faced Pasupathinatha in the golden temple. Pasupathinath is the tutelary deity of the kings of Nepal. But the priests who minister to Him are Brahmins from South India. When Swamiji visited the temple the whole place was reverberating to the repetition of holy names, recital of hymns, etc. His

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heart thrilled at the unique sight of such a vast concourse of Sanyasins and Sanyasinis wearing robes of all sorts. At the end of the festival the great multitude broke up and the foreigners departed for their residences according to royal orders. But Swamiji, at the pressing request of certain sanyasins and householders who lived in the locality, chose to stay on in the solitary corner of a Dasanami asram on the bank of the Vangmathi. Gradually the fame of his saintly life and great learning spread abroad and sadhus and large numbers of people came to pay homage to him. Among them were Brahmins and Kshatriyas and people of other castes too. Every evening he held discourses and discussions on Jnana, Raja, Karma and Bhakti yogas. Among his visitors some were earnest seekers after truth, rich in dispassion, discrimination etc., and entitled to true knowledge; others were eager to compass material ends such as wealth and wordly pleasures by acquiring occult powers. The latter wished to be instructed in yogic exercises. Some were labouring under the illusion that the end and aim of sanyasin's life was the acquisition of siddhis, marvellous powers dazzling the eyes of ignorant people. Evidently they had not come into contact with enlightened people and learnt better. Swamiji was able to dispel many of these misconceptions with direct quotations from the Vedas and appropriate explanations and advice. The substance of the advice he gave them was this:

"Siddhi" is the manifestation of some uncommon power. Siddhis are by the legion; it is impossible to count them or limit them. The person who possesses the power is called a "Siddha". Some are born siddhas; others, yogis believe, can acquire siddhis through medicines, spells and incantations, tapas and austerities, as well as by Samadhi. For creatures that fly through the sky, that skill is natural. Similarly on a consideration of the conduct and skill, it will be easily clear that all creatures are born with certain powers. Among earthly beings, the king possesses royal wealth; the lion has fierceness and strength; the musk-deer produces musk; the insect vajra-damshtra pierces all kinds of substances; the whole grows huge in size the mother of pearl produces pearl; the leech draws out blood; the eagle sees far; the owl sees in darkness, the beetle

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bores through wood. These exceptional skills and powers prove that all animals, whatever be their variety, have in-born siddhis. Let the source of the siddhi be anything—birth, medicine, spell or whatever it be, siddhi is but siddhi; it is nothing more. Fire is fire whether it is in grass or wood—nothing more, nothing less—so also is siddhi. So also is siddha. That being so, one will have to admit that the great yogins who have acquired the marvellous power and the born siddhas are on the same footing. The born siddhas, it is clear, lead lives of sorrow and pain as worldlings distracted by desire, anger, etc., in the forest of egoism and attachment. Those who have acquired siddhis, too, are unable to transcend the limits of worldliness. In the lack of true devotion and knowledge which alone can dispel the darkness of worldliness, both types of siddhas are equal. So the object of 'sanyasa' and 'tapas' is not the acquisition of siddhis but the gaining of that ultimate liberation which can be secured through steadfast devotion to God and through the knowledge of the Supreme Truth, which alone destroys all desires and leads to supreme and everlasting peace which is unattainable even by the gods.

It is wrong to infer that those great ones who have attained the vision of God must possess all the siddhis because of the blessing of God and their power of mind-control. The mind-control that leads to the acquisition of siddhis and the purity of the mind that *secures* the vision of God are different, according to all authorities. If those great ones who have seen God have also mind-control, they being full of dispassion and discrimination, will use it only for Self-realization, not for the acquisition of material siddhis because they know that all earthly siddhis are only obstacles in the way of Self-realization. "O God! friend of the wretched, if you are pleased with this humble servant, give me steadfast love and true knowledge. O great Ocean of Mercy, lift me, sad and wretched as I am, from this shoreless sea of wordly misery. In this worthless, unsubstantial world there is but one thing that is substantial. I crave for only that steadfast love for you, nothing else." Such will be their sincere, allout prayer. They will never ask for wordly 'siddhis', for those are the nauseating things they have already

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discarded. If some of the knowers of Brahman exhibit the power of the word (their words pass true), the power of seeing into the future, etc., be sure these are not the result of Brahma-jnana or of love for God, but of the sadhanas (spiritual and mental exercises) they have performed for the purpose. That is what the scriptures declare. The skill to climb a coconut tree is not the result of the knowledge of Brahman or of sanyasa, but of the training to climb. Similarly the skill in enchantment, medicine, etc., is the result of the studies in those arts, not of the love of God or of Sanyasa.

Some people hold that since 'siddhas' do good to the world by granting children, wealth or knowledge, to those who require them, they are superior to the sanyasins who do nothing of the kind. If some 'siddhas' do possess such power and use them for the benefit of others they may be conferring some temporary benefit upon some people as doctors or rulers do. But how can they be said to be superior to the true knowers of Brahman who alone do imperishable good to mankind by teaching them the Supreme Truth that finally emancipates them from Earthly sorrow?"

Similar discussions on spiritual topics and Upanishadic Truth were held every day at these meetings. That women did not freely participate in these discussions and meetings, unlike at other places, was a unique feature of these gatherings. One day the discussion turned on the topic of meat eating. Two or three larned Brahmins who used to eat meat took part in the discussion. Swamiji with appropriate arguments established that meat eating is blameworthy and forbidden. According to the principle "जीवो जीवस्य जीवनं", no creature can live without killing other creatures. Yet, as far as possible, the infliction of pain and death should be avoided—that is the essence of the teaching of "Ahimsa". Where is the yogi who can avoid unconscious and inevitable 'himsa?' (violence) If one can sustain oneself by consuming lifeless things, why should he commit the sin of killing living creatures in whom sensibility is developed? 'Tamasik' nature has its origin in meat eating. That also is an important reason why

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meat-eating should be given up. So all truly religious people, especially 'sadhus' who aim at spiritual practices, should give up that bad habit. There are certain passages in the Vedas and the Smritis that seem to suggest that even the great Rishis of old used to eat meat. Even if these statements are taken literally it would be better to give up meat eating because it is intrinsically bad. Perhaps it would be better to interpret those passages as allegorical. With such explanations and comments Swamiji convinced his hearers that meat eating should be given up. He also made it clear to them that if chastity is compulsory for women, monogamy ought to be compulsory for men, because chastity and monogamy are indispensible to heavenly as well as earthly happiness and peace. These are very necessary for unbroken and lasting love to one person. Swamiji concluded his discussion on the subject in a tone of high seriousness that youngmen, even if they are zions of royal dynasties should not indulge in immoral lives because such lives are bound to lead them ultimately to hellish suffering.

Everyday such spiritual discussions were held at his residence; besides, he went about visiting the three towns including Khatmandu. In these towns he was eager to visit ancient Buddhist Viharas, Hindu temples and other sights. In addition to this, whenever he had some leisure he devoted himself to the study of the strange and wonderful history of the state of Nepal. In a state of ecstasy he almost lost count of time, Days and weeks fleeted away as if they were so many minutes or hours and then all on a sudden he had an attack of smallpox. The disease itself was not serious but it roused him to serious thoughts. For some days he was not able to stir out of his bed. Even in that state of peril, some devotees who used to attend the religious discussions, etc., nursed him tenderly with all the affection of near kinsmen. By the grace of God he soon recovered from the illness. Ignorant people, living at home surrounded by their wives and children, enjoying their affectionate attention, fancy that upon earth they can receive real love only from their family; that such love is unavailable elsewhere, that kinship alone can assure one of sincere affection. Such misconceptions narrow down the feelings of people who aim

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at worldly enjoyment and confine themselves to the limits of their own homes. But the enlightened know that love, like electricity is universal. It is immanent everywhere and in all people and it will manifest itself in congenial surroundings. Love begets love. If you want others to love you, you must love them yourself. If, on the principle "वसुधैवकुडुम्बकं", a man loves all others as members of his own family, to him the whole world will be full of love; nothing will appear to be loveless. So men must try to sublimate their narrow, brutish and pleasure—loving loyalties into unselfish, unlimited, and Divine Love. If they do, they can certainly find sweet love everywhere. None will hate us, none will desert us. This was exactly the same thing he told his kinsmen who were shedding tears when he bade farewell to them with the words, "As a sanyasin I shall be wandering in the Himalayan regions of the North." Well, there was nothing strange if those devotees whom he treated with love and blessed with beneficent advice, showered love upon him and served him with their money, word and deed.

The Spring was now at an end and Khatmandu was growing hot. Swamiji, who had long decided to visit Mt. Kailas famous for its supreme natural beauty and had been waiting for the most suitable time now realised that the hour had come. One day he told his sincere devotees, "I desire to visit Kailas this year itself. So I have decided to embark upon the pilgrimage shortly". As the news became known, several persons came to Swamiji and requested him to spend at least a year in that capital town, so that they might have an opportunity of meeting him again and again. Others came and said "Revered Swamiji, we want to learn higher books on Vedanta like Mandokyakarika, sitting at your feet. We, therefore, pray you to stay on for some more time". Still others urged him to remain at Khatmandu on other grounds. They said, "Swamiji, your body, as tender as flower and very week, won't stand the strain of such an arduous journey over high mountains and deep valleys. You have to cross snow-covered peaks immensely high. Only strong-builtmen, inured to hard toil, can hope to reach the

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holy mountain. So, stay on in peace. Let us be blessed with your holy 'darshan' and association". All such requests and exhortations of the young and the old, of the sanyasins as well as householders, failed to move him and make him change his resolve. When the news of Swamiji's decision reached the ears of Karnavikram Saha, a very devout nobleman and brother-in-law to H. H. the Maharaja of Nepal, he immediately made all arrangements of his own accord for Swamiji's long and difficult journey. Accordingly on an auspicious day, after prostrating himself before Pasupathinath, Swamiji set out, meditating upon the Lord of Kailas. His heart was full of faith and joy. He was looking upon that dangerous and difficult journey just as one form of penance. Only the merits accumulated through previous lives could enable a man to accomplish such a journey. Upon the pilgrimage Swamiji was accompanied by a young Sanyasin from Assam named Anandagiri. He was enterprising by nature; at the same time full of humility, He too was happy because he could serve Swamiji and visit Kailas. Since Swamiji himself wrote a detailed account of this difficult pilgrimage soon after his return under the caption "Kailas yatra", in his mother tongue Malayalam, and since it has been published by Sri K. Krishnan Nair, Editor of the paper "Manorama" no attempt is made here to go over the same ground.

The pilgrims covered the first lap of the journey partly on foot and partly in a horse-drawn carriage. Crossing forests extending over a large area they reached a town called Veeraganj and rested there. Resuming the journey by train and travelling with Anandagiri and a Nepali officer he next arrived at a small town called Nepalganj. From there there are certain tracks passing through the source of the river Gandaki and places of pilgrimage like Sri Muktinarayanam, going up to Kailas. Swamiji did not choose to take any of them knowing how rough the terrain was. In that beautiful, cosy little town in the Himalayan valley he stayed a few days as the guest of a high Government officer. Then, in the company of a brave, prince of the Jarjjarcote royal family, he went forward slowly, followed by some servants who carried their provisions. For

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a short distance he was carried in a vehicle borne by men. Plain, broad and beautiful extensive fields with small forests between them and villages, provided him with pleasant sights all along the way. Along the route villagers received the party with respect and presented them with various offerings. Then they entered thick and fierce forests proclaiming the greatness and glory of the divine mountain.

The majestic forest, full of movable and immovable things he had never seen before, afforded him much pleasure and at the same time appeared, like the sea of worldly existence, impassable, perilous and unbounded. The entire forests region lay blazing in the scorching rays of the sun. Fire was raging here and there. Even in day time the forest resounded with the roar of the tiger, and the grunting of wild boars. Like the heart of the wicked man, full of evil qualities, the interior of the forest was filled with savage wild beasts, whose very names were such as to inspire terror and aversion. With the tall *Sal* and other trees interlacing their leafy branches and creating a dark shade, the heart of the forest at midday appeared as dark as at midnight and the bright flowers dotting the shade looked like silvery stars shining in the dark sky. Here and there, there were pellucid streams flowing through the forest. Deer of different colours and other animals could be seen in large numbers moving about in the glades and thickets. Such sights of unfamiliar and extra-ordinary beauty turned Swamiji's mind to the great Creator and led it into a state of samadhi. In the midst of such uncommon splendours of Nature, he experienced the highest state of bliss (Brahmananda) prayed for by the learned but experienced by only men of supreme merit. What more had he to gain, having already secured that supreme bliss of which even the joy of the emperor of emperors upon earth is only an infinitesimal part?

Thus he passed six or seven days proceeding laboriously along the bank of the (Bhairavee) Ganga, through grand beautiful and deep forests. Then the forests grew thinner and fewer and Swamiji reached another part of the Himalayan region which was peopled more thickly. Walking slowly in three or four days he reached the capital of Jarjjaracote state, built

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on the crest of a small hill in the same river valley. In that place solitary, peaceful and lovely, he spent a few days as the guest of the royal family. Subsequently, at the request of the prince who had escorted him, he shifted to the summerhouse of the Royal family situated on the top of a high hill nearby. He was very much exhausted with travel and so the Prince requested him to ride on horse back. Even though Swamiji disliked the idea, he tried the expedient, but was soon convinced that for a sanyasin riding on the back of any animal is ill-suited and incongruous. Learning by experience he soon gave up riding, got down and began to walk. This was, of course, a very minor incident but not without some significance. That is why it is mentioned in this context. In a beautiful hermitage built by the King's men for Swamiji's residence in a forest not far from the Royal court, he began to live in 'tapasya' cut off from the outside world, like the Brahmarshis and Rajarshis of old.

Here there was nothing to distract Swamiji's attention or to disturb him—no scripture discussions, no worldly affairs, no scholars, no learners, no ignoramuses. He therefore spent his days immersed in the meditation of Self. Day and night he experienced the secret of wise words. "The plurality that the ignorant believe in and is at the root of all fear is an illusion; the unchanging "Parabrahman" alone shines as Truth". Thus drinking in the natural beauty of the forests and immersing himself in Supreme bliss he stayed at the hermitage for some time. The sweet-scented flowers like jasmine in the gardens around him and the clear cold streams reminded him of the Paradise that worldly men so ardently desire to reach after death.

During his residence there, not only the servants of the King but also the villagers in the neighbourhood were eager to serve him and satisfy him. They brought to him sweet fruits and roots as well as milk, honey, curds and other foods and drinks dear to them. Swamiji whose mind was turned inward and fixed upon the Self, partook of their offerings and wandered in the woods freely to his great joy. Those days became an unforgettable period in his life. At the end of a few months he accompanied the members of the royal family

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to a palace higher up the mountain. Partly on account of bodily fatigue and partly because of his association with royalty, he was constrained to ride in a palanquin for a short distance. Thus during this pilgrimage to Kailas, even if it were for very short distances, he had to be borne in a palanquin thrice and ride on horseback once. Never had he travelled in this fashion before, nor did he ever repeat it again. Such travel can not be to a Sanyasin's liking; it illfits his way of life. On those occasions referred to above Swamiji felt guilty and uneasy in mind. He therefore tried to comfort himself with the argument that those were purely acts of emergency (apatdharma) and that in no case he had exceeded reasonable limits.

Having overcome fatigue with two or three days' stay, Swamiji started from there with Anandagiri and another young-man who kept company with them as a guide at the King's orders. For four days they travelled through formidable forests. Then laboriously crossing a high peak they alighted on a broad and beautiful plain. It is on this plain that the far-famed temple Chandananath is situated. Arbours decked with variegated flowers, meadows covered with lush grass, high peaks wearing helmets of silvery ice-caps—such sights in the region brought pleasure and peace to the eye as well as the heart.

Chandananath was once the abode of two saintly sanyasins, Chandana and Bhairava revered even by the gods. Swamiji prostrated himself with devotion at their feet (in the temple). He was surprised to find gingili and similar plants growing in extensive fields at such a great height. Sitting on one of the highest peaks of Himavan and noticing the glory of the Divine mountain, Swamiji thought of the unique greatness of his own motherland and his heart swelled with legitimate pride. Surrounded by ice-covered peaks on every side he sat for some time enjoying the supermundane beauty of the scene.

At that holy spot in the recesses of the mountain, Swamiji rested for a few days either in the extensive and beautiful temples or in the houses of the important Brahmin citizens enjoying the hospitality of the high officers of the Government or of the Sanyasins. Again he set out Northwards, to climb up and down the high mountains. On learning of his departure,

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natives of the place belonging to all walks and stations of life, flocked to him and requested him to pass some more time with them. They promised to make all arrangements for his comfortable stay. For one thing, they were eager to have his company; for another, they were anxious about his safety, so emaciated he already was and so frequently subject to fits of fever. Swamiji, of course, appreciated their good intentions but paid no heed to their request. He had set his heart solely on his visit to Kailas. Like a lover speeding to his tryst heedless of all risks, Swamiji moved briskly forward. Several persons of high standing accompanied him to some distance. A devout and noble Brahmin who graced the exalted seat of judge, placed some silver coins at Swamiji's feet, prostrated himself before him and with folded hands repeatedly pressed him to accept the amount as a gift. In Nepal Swamiji had associated himself closely with very wealthy people and they had, time and again, urged him to accept their gifts but swamiji, full of the spirit of dispassion had hitherto resolutely refused to take anything. But now, attracted by the love, humility and faith of the donor, he yielded to his wish and accepted the coins. He spent those coins on the way upon some good purpose or other. As provisions for the journey some persons supplied him according to the custom of the land, with a mixture of ghee, honey and powdered popped corn. At the directions of the judge, a Brahmin accompanied him to Tibet. Swamiji accepted the convenience offered to him unsought, and wishing good to all those who came to see him off, he continued his journey.

In front stood a very high mountain. Although with much difficulty, he succeeded in crossing it by night fall and reached a wayside village on the other side. The villagers received him with respect and entertained him liberally. He passed the night at the village. In the morning he sent back the Brahmin whom the judge had sent for his help and refreshed by a restful night he began to climb the next mountain, regardless of all the fears of his physical weakness. He was followed by the young sanyasin who stuck to him like his own shadow and another servant. In a state of ecstasy he passed through deep forests and climbed high mountains all unmindful of physical

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discomforts. In four or five days he reached a village called Seemacrosm. He stayed two days with the local judge and set out again. Walking three or four days he arrived at another beautiful little town Yaree. The head of the village was out of station; but the villagers received him with loving hospitality. Passing the night there, he continued the journey next morning. That day he reached the Nara Pass on the Northern border of Nepal. The mountain pass, several thousand feet high, inspires joy and terror all at once. Facing and overcoming several obstacles on the way by the grace of the Lord of Kailas he crossed the pass. The sight from the top of the pass was really celestial—a bird's eye-view of the endless chain of snow-covered mountains, silvery peaks piercing the cloud line and rising still higher into the sky, as described in the Puranas—it is impossible to describe. To seek to convey the effect of the sight in words will be as ludicrous as the dwarf's stretching out his hand and straining himself to pluck down a fruit which can be reached only by a giant.

Getting down from the pass he reached Tibet. What first caught his attention on the plains was a big lamassery called Khocharnath. He went into it and paid homage to Sri Buddha and the other gods. The priest came out to receive him and then led him to the other monks. Hundreds of these monks were sitting in two rows studying the scriptures and singing hymns. After greeting them all in the proper way Swamiji too took his seat beside them. After the study and service he drank tea and ate the powdered popped corn that the monks gave him. For some time he sat with them discussing religious matters. Then they directed him to a hermitage for rest. It was extremely cold. He had with him no adequate supplies of clothing. The blanket of wool that he generally used was with his companion who had not yet reached the monastery. The fellow was by nature a sluggard. The obstacles and discomforts of the journey added to his sluggishness made him as slow as a tortoise in his movements. So he passed the night in vigil with great discomfort. Next morning he ate the food that the monks offered him and set out again proceeding along the even bank of the Karnali river, a tributory of the Sarayu,

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he reached the village Thaklacrodum, a famous centre of trade, before sunset. By this time Swamiji was too feverish to push forward. So he had to pass a couple of days with a Nepali officer. As soon as he felt better he resumed his journey. Crossing regions covered with mountain trees and vegetation and inhabited by Buddhists, he reached, by sunset, a plain well-known as Gauriguha. The plain stretches at the foot of Mt. Mandhata, the dreaded haunt of robbers and thieves. Very few people dared pass over the plain, so infamous it had become. The plain was all bare, devoid of trees or plants. As the sun had set and darkness had spread over the plain and as Swamiji had lost his directions, he could not proceed. So he took his seat on the bank of a river. Hardly had an hour passed when two terrible-looking fellows, bearing swords and spears came to Swamiji. They examined him from head to foot, repeatedly touched the 'Rudraksha' garland that Swamiji wore round his neck and laughing loudly seated themselves before him. The place and the person convinced Swamiji that they were robbers but he betrayed no sign of fear. He cordially greeted them and stroking their knees gently with his hands entered into conversation with them. Swamiji had no reason to fear them, as he carried nothing valuable with him, because of the vow of non-possession. For the same reason the robbers showed no eagerness to plunder him. They laughed and said something in their strange language. The conversation between them and Swamiji was continued with the help of gestures. Swamiji told them inter alia "I am extremely hungry, if you have any food with you, give me some. Nor do I know in which direction I have to proceed to get out of this place". Understanding him, with great devotion they took down a bundle hanging on their backs and untying the cloth, took out some saktu flour, (popped corn flour) and placed it at the foot of Swamiji, prostrated themselves and said, "We live at some distance. If you are pleased to come there we will give you enough food". In reply Swamiji told them "This is the time to rest, not to walk" and refused to comply with their requests. Then the robbers showed him clearly the direction in which he was to proceed next morning and then disappeared into

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the night. Swamiji is here giving for the benefit of the seekers—just one of the many instances in which the vow of non-possession and his fraternal love for all living beings stood him in good stead and brought threatening situations to pleasant terminations. He never came across those robbers again.

Rain had just begun to trickle. Feverish as he was, he had to pass the night in the open. Next morning, with Anandagiri, he proceeded in the direction pointed out to him by the robber brothers. On the way he met robbers again and again. Yet with courage he slowly moved forward and before 4 P.M. reached a monastery to the South-East of the famous Manasasarovar. Swamiji felt very happy. The object for which he had put up with all these acute discomforts was now, by the grace of God, within his grasp. He had every reason to be gratified.

That wonderful lake with its celestial beauty, shining like an ornament of Goddess Earth, charmed Swamiji's mind all at once. Sitting on the glass-like rocks around the holy lake he drank in the beauty of the heavenly landscape sweetened by the melodious songs of birds. In proportion to the eagerness he had felt hitherto to visit the lake, his joy mounted on the actual sight of it.

कैलास पर्वते राम, मनसा निर्मितं परम् ।
ब्रह्मणा नरशार्दूल, तेनेदं मानसं सरः ॥

(O! Rama, this lake was created on Mt. Kailas by the mind of the Creator, Brahma.) It is thus the first of the poets describes it; it is in its pellucid waters that Apsara women joyously bathe and have their sports, it is on its shores that the Kalpaka trees flourish with their leaves, flowers and fruits; it is on its shores that not only Kamadhenu but also Airavatha and Uchaisravas freely range about feeding themselves; the premises of the lake are the dear abode of the Yakshas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas, Siddhas, etc., it is close to this that Kailasa, the abode of Siva, stands; this is the sporting ground of the swans that feed on golden lotuses—such is the description of the lake given by the great poets who were ravished by its natural beauty and its

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historical significance. Who will not be filled with eager curiosity to visit that lovely lake? Swamiji sat down on the beautiful shore of this Queen of lakes with a smile on his lips, enjoying the beauty that flowed to him from all directions. The more he drank of it, the more thirsty he became. His mind never got satiated. In winter the water in the lake will freeze into solid ice; but in summer the lake will be full of deep blue water. Flocks of birds resembling the fabled hamsa (swan) move about on its surface. On its eight corners stand eight famous monasteries. It is enclosed by high walls of mountains on all sides. It looks like a perfect circle with a circumference of fifty miles. In short, it is the centre of heavenly beauty. Whether divine trees flourish on its shores or not; whether the divine elephants, goddesses and Devendra himself sport there or not; whether the Divine Dancer (Nataraj) here dances or not; whether the swans that feed on pearls play here or not; it is all the same. Why waste time in vain investigation? The lake shines as beautiful today as it shone ever before and it will continue to shine so as long as the moon and stars shine. There is no doubt about it. This is no exaggeration. It remains ever new, ever fresh. 'Age cannot wither nor custom stale its infinite variety.' Poets, Western as well as Eastern have endeavoured to describe its beauty but, gifted poets as they are, they have to be satisfied with touching upon some aspect of its loveliness. So their descriptions however colourful, remain inperfect. Reality here surpasses all imagination.

After spending two or three days on the shore of the lake he moved northwards visiting the monasteries where peace reigns supreme, worshipping the gods and greeting the holy monks in them and receiving their blessings. With great satisfaction he moved still forward to Kailas which was so near. Now he was in no hurry. Proceeding slowly he entered upon the table land of Kailas in three or four days.

For the first time in his life he saw Kailas which he had till now seen only in imagination, standing before his very eyes—Kailas where Sri Parameswara, conqueror of Kama, and Lord of the 'Bhutas' abide with His spouse—Kailas which is inaccessible even to the gods—Kailas, which even Lord Vishnu,

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Lord of Lakshmi, ascends with bowed head and beating heart, with gentle steps and slow, as directed by the keepers of the gate—Kailas, whose sight keeps the mind of the enlightened ones like Sanaka ever fixed on dispassion, Kailas, in whose audience hall the great Rishis themselves wait for His darshan—All those who have once seen the mountain will be convinced of the truth and propriety of the Rishis' fancy in relation to the snowy region as the abode of Lord Siva. Where can the Lord of Peace live except here? Where can the Lord of Knowledge abide except in a place like this? Who is this Siva? Siva is Truth; Siva is Beauty—so say all the scriptures. If it is, what is improper with the conception that one of those beautiful places is the abode of Lord Siva?

At foot, the circumference of the very high and circular peak is thirty miles. This tapering peak which very much resembles the great towers of Tamil temples, is covered with thicker layers of snow as it rises higher and higher into the sky. All around there are lovely streams and lovely lakes like Gaurikunda and the peak is adorned with beautiful monasteries on every side. It is entirely of black granite, but shines white with a perpetual cap of snow. Like Lake Manasa, this peak also, with its great natural beauty and historic significance, charms the hearts of visitors and raises their minds to a lofty state of unalloyee happiness. To test the true nature of beauty "क्षणे क्षणे यन्नवतामुपैति तदेवरूपं रमणीयतायाः" To appear fresh every second is the true nature of beauty. It may truly be said there is no better place on the face of the earth than Kailas or the Manasa. At the sight of the silver mountain, which he had never seen before, his heart, so easily accessible to natural beauty, began to dance with joy. "How blessed I am!" "How blessed I am!" he murmured to himself in self-gratification.

A region so high and so cold; a body emaciated and weakened by disease; lack of clothing to protect the weak body from the extreme cold; first, rain and then snow fall—It was with great difficulty he spent a night in the open air. Next morning, feeling that he had escaped death during the night owing solely to the mercy of the Lord of Kailas, he got ready

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to return. The circumambulation of the peak is one of the most important items of a visit to Kailas—Swamiji knew it, but he did not entertain the idea even for a second; so weak was he. He therefore prostrated himself devoutly and repeatedly to the Lord and started on the return journey. Before he had proceeded far, a wealthy lady who was then camping on the wide plain stopped him and led him to her tent. There she treated him to food and drink of a great variety and furnished him with provisions for his journey. The food gave him new energy. He now proceeded to Rakshasathal-a lake as extensive as Manasasaras itself. Having rested there a little, he began to climb down. He had to suffer much because of the difficult route and unbearable heat. But enjoying the sensuous charms of beautiful landscapes and the spiritual joy of thought, he alleviated his suffering and returned to Thaklacrodam with a happy and satisfied mind.

Although he stayed three days at the village he got no relief from his illness. His condition grew worse, but that did not stop him. He made a start and began to climb the very high and very difficult Lippu Pass. To cross this pass is no easy task even for strong and well-built men. If, then, Swamiji understood the task it was not out of confidence in his physical strength—it was out of sheer will power. On a fine, bright morning, he being an investigator began his climb. But what can man's investigation do in the face of the rainy season which can, in no time, turn a bright day into a dark and wet one? Or when the Omnipotent one is on the watch? In the morning there was not a speck of cloud in the sky; but in a few hours dark and threatening clouds covered the whole sky. Before long it began to rain cats and dogs. "Thy will be done", Swamiji said to himself and began to walk slowly over the immense, snow-covered Pass, as if he were sauntering over the beach in Bombay or Madras. Bare-footed, without umbrella body weakened by disease, without food or warm clothing, etc.—despite all this he moved forward without fear or worry. Soon it was clear his weak body could not resist the combined effect of the cold of snow from below and of rain from above. He could now hardly move his limbs. It seemed that his body

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would soon become numb and it would fall down anywhere. Still he proceeded step by step, resting every now and then, rubbing his hands together to produce a little warmth. In this manner, with great difficulty, he reached the top of the Pass and began to climb down. Just then snowing started. Anandagiri was faithful and eager to serve, but he was rather thickheaded. Going in advance, he pushed forward in the comfortable hope that Swamiji would be following through slowly and soon disappeared in the distance. All alone and helpless, Swamiji climbed down a short distance; then, benumbed with excessive cold, unable to take one more step, he lay down on the surface of a rock in the open. Consciousness had not left him yet. So, even in that hour of utter despair he lay there wondering how God would deal with him. He had more curiosity than fear for life. There is no nook or corner where God's helping hand would not reach. Three or four sanyasins, fat and sleek who were coming in the rear now arrived near him. Finding him in that pitiable state they devoutly prostrated themselves before him and tried to comfort him. "What has weakened you so much? Don't worry. Near here there is a place of rest. We shall slowly move on to that place. Now, take this and see whether you can gain a little strength." So saying they gave him some sweet meats made of wheat flour. Swamiji ate them and felt a little refreshed. Then leaning on their hands he slowly walked to the place of rest. What a place of rest! Think not for a moment it was like the Taj Mahal Hotel of Bombay. It was a narrow, old, decayed structure almost on the point of falling down. The whole atmosphere was vitiated with the foul smell of the dung of horses and donkeys. To lie down or to sit upon there was not an inch of clean space. Anandagiri was already there waiting for his master's arrival. They passed the dismal night under a boulder of stone. They could not even light a fire for lack of firewood.

In the rays of the morning sun the whole place seemed to be covered with molten silver. In the wonder and joy of that rare sight Swamiji forgot all his fatigue and pain. Like the embodiment of the merit of mankind the sun rose gloriously. The people started in their various directions. Happy in the

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thought that God had reclaimed him from death a second time during that same journey, Swamiji continued his journey. The previous night had not been very restful and his body was still weak. Yet he decided to proceed slowly along his route. Presently he arrived at a big village called Garvyang. It was the Janmashtami Day. So he passed the whole day in the contemplation of Lord Krishna. He spent two or three days more in the place to regain strength. Then he set out again slowly crossing rivers and hills. Taking thrice as much time as he previously used to do, he reached the well-known city of Almora. On the way he had to cross a very high mountain named Narponia. By the time he reached the other side he was completely exhausted. It was sundown. He decided to rest at a decayed and dirty grass hut he found near him. With Anandagiri in his company he came to the hut. The owner of the hut was a very poor middle aged widow who lived there with her children. As soon as she saw them she received them with great respect, At their intrusion at such a late hour she did not appear angry or displeased. On the contrary, she appeared to be eager to help them. She was really sorry that there was no food in the house to offer to her guests. So, in that night she went out to her field with a spade in her hand and dug out some potatoes. She boiled them with salt and offered to them saying, " I am very poor. Sorry there is nothing better to offer you. So kindly accept what I have ", While Swamiji and Anandagiri were eating that sweet and tasty food, they discussed various wordly and spiritual matters with their hostess.

Ha! If only the number of those noble women, cultured, religious, dutiful and loving, whom Swamiji met in the neighbourhood of Mt. Kailas, went up, no doubt, the demoniac nature of the present world will give way to the divine one. The Vedic saying " मातृमान् पितृमान् आचार्यवान् वेद " remains ever true. Mothers, are our best and noblest teachers. While they suckle their babes at their breast they impart to them the highest virtures as well. Swamiji felt that his meeting with such noble women was enough reward for all his wanderings.

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Well, Swamiji rested for some days in the vicinity of the mountain. Then he went to Bareilly by bus. On the way he visited the lovely Asrams of the Aryasamajist leader, Narayana Swami, situated not far from Almora. At Bareilly he lived a few days depending on Madhukari bhiksha (collecting small morsels of food as bees collect honey from innumerable flowers). He himself used to go out for bhiksha at noon. Unskilled in the art, he had at times unexpected and unpleasant experiences. Once it was into the house of a courtesan that he got in to ask for food. On another occasion, it was into the harem of a wealthy man. There young women, half naked, were engaged in sports, games and various kinds of merrymaking. On seeing a youthful intruder wearing the garb of a sanyasin entering their precincts they fled boisterously in all directions, like crows when a stone is flung into their midst.

In a short time, several devotee gathered around him and at their request he spent some days discussing the scriptures with them. Then, by train, he set out for Rishikesh. It was from here he had started on that difficult penance of a pilgrimage to Kailas. He had returned to the same place bringing his venture, by the grace of God, to a successful close. "All is well that ends well" is a very meaningful saying.

Does a pilgrimage confer any spiritual benefit? Perhaps it does; perhaps it doesn't. But one thing Swamiji fully realised. The sight of the wonderful landscapes and objects of Nature purifies the soul, as beating improves the quality of gold.

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CHAPTER 4

Of all objects of veneration the Self is the most venerable. It is the noblest 'theertha', the holiest of holies, the fairest of the fair, the dearest among the dear, priceless, unsurpassed. It is of the nature of Sat (Existence) Chit, (Knowledge), Ananda (Bliss). It is to be sought after by everybody. It shines by Itself, like the sun, in every heart and at all times. Then, why seek other 'theerthas'? Where shall man go to purify his Self? Why rush here or there to enjoy the beauty of beautiful objects? Immerse yourself in happiness in this principle of Self; purify yourself, keep it in view every moment of your life, find joy in this ever beautiful thing. In the corner of his room is a hive full of honey, but the fool rushes about the world frantically for a drop of it. He sees not the hoarded gold in his house and goes about begging for pieces of copper. To search for peace and happiness in external objects is in no way different from this. He who seeks happiness outside himself will never find satisfaction. That man alone is truly happy who finds joy in his own Self. The enlightened Sanyasin finds the joy of Self when he goes about on pilgrimage visiting 'theerthas and mountains. The Self itself is the world. When one has realized that there is not an atom apart from the Self, how can he find himself in a foreign land? He is ever moving about in the Self finding his joy. Even in inaccessible regions he rejoices like a child. To the left or to the right, in front or behind, above or below, he perceives only the Self. For him everything that comes or goes, sees or hears, takes or gives or speaks is Brahman. As in the waters of the Deluge he sports about in the all pervading Satchidananda (Existence-knowledge-bliss). Whether that body is engaged in action according to the inclination inherited from previous lives or whether he sits stock-still in medication—it is all the same. If he has realized the Self, no longer identifying himself with the body, he finds everlasting joy in the Self itself.

Our Swamiji who had realized the Self was not adversely affected by the arduous pilgrimage to Kailas. Nor is it to be contradicted if anybody asserts that, in a worldly sense, he had

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made several gains by that pilgrimage. It may be admitted to be so. Whatever that be, having completed the 'tapasya' successfully he settled down in a hut at Rishikesh and began to practise severer austerities. The hut belonged to Swami Govindagiriji who was then the head of the group of sanyasins from the South. Swami Govindagiriji proved very helpful to him. On return from Kailas, Swamiji passed his days in religious discussions and in the study and teaching of Vedanta. Once a day he went to the feeding house and received his bhiksha. During that long and difficult pilgrimage, owing to the poor quality and irregularity of meals, he had contracted dysentery. The sufferings and the lack of liberty resulting from indisposition, caused him some distraction during the first few days. By the grace of God and thanks to the affectionate attention bestowed upon by brother sanyasins, he regained his health before long. Although without money or help he endured the illness patiently without complaint or feeling of worry. If one gives way to worry and sorrow in the face of pain, how can he come to know the Truth?

Swamiji had already studied a large number of books on various systems of philosophy, but now, on regaining his health, he went to Kailas Asrama, a resort of learned sanyasins, and began to study Brihidaranyaka Bhashya and Varthika under a sanyasin of mature age and wisdom. Thus enjoying the undying pleasure resulting from the realization of Self and the study of the scriptures he passed there weeks as quickly as if they were merely so many days. During this time, his sanyasin friends, both northern and southern, used to advise him respectfully, "You desire to lead the life of a sanyasin." Then why not get formally initiated? You must get all the rites properly performed by a Knower of Brahman, according to the rules of the order of Dasanamis. The scriptures say that the Samskaras purify. Conformity with rules safeguards the tradition. Swamiji of course, knew all these 'Sastraic' injunctions but, feeling that such conformity with rules is not the really essential thing, had paid little attention to them so far. So, when the friends urged him to conform, his reaction was generally unfavourable. This was the gist of his answer:

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"Just think, what do these 'samskaras' (rites of initiation) purify—body, mind or the Self? They can not purify either the body or the mind. As for the Self, being ever pure, it requires no purification. That I have been purified by the Samskaras, that all those who have failed to receive the Samskaras remain impure—are illusions cherished only by fools. Irrespective of the Samskaras, it is good action that purifies man. That being so, a sinner, even if he undergoes the Samskaras does not become pure. If initiation purifies the devout one, it may be pointed out, the devout one will be pure even without external rites. If the uprooting of evil and the establishment of good is purification, it is clear purification requires no initiating rites. Whether these traditional rites are performed or not, what an aspirant has to do is to become good and get established in Truth; if on the contrary, he feels proud of belonging to some particular Order, the result is isolation, hatred and littleness of mind.

Swamiji, on the spur of the moment, rebutted all the arguments advanced by the advocates of external rites. He however, yielded to the pressure of his well-wishers later on. 'A custom may be logical or illogical; but when it is honoured by long tradition, by immemorial practice, it becomes a bounden duty. He who repudiates such a custom goes beyond the pale of 'dharma', beyond the pale of community life. Social boycott and non-co-operation can not affect one's life hereafter; but life here may be slightly affected. It is therefore better to accept 'sanyasa' with proper rites and become a member of the society of sanyasins. Thereby with the help of other sanyasins, one can make life here run smooth". Such were the arguments put forward by his well meaning friends. Swamiji did not fully approve of these arguments either. His own view was "There is much to learn by association with society. Without becoming a member of a particular society it will not be possible to come into intimate relation with the society itself. In these circumstances, even though formal acceptance of sanyasa is superfluous, it is better to become a member of the order of 'Dasanami Sanyasins'. "Having arrived at this conclusion he consulted many learned and elderly sanyasins as

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to the proper person from whom he could accept sanyasa. At last he decided to approach H. H. Srimad Janardanagiri Swami who was then Head of Kailas Mutt and equally well versed in Karma as well as Brahma Vidya. According to His Holiness' directions he completed the formal rites on the next Maha Sivarathri Day, with the help of the good and loving Sri Vishnu Devanandaji and others. Guruji changed the former name into a new one with the suffix " Thapovanom ". Thus all the well-known rites of the Sri Sankara Order were completed. The change of status did not mean any dislocation of the way of life, it continued more or less as before. In this context something deserves mention.

The war-like Nairs once lorded over the famous state, Kerala. They were of Kshatriya blood, possessed of all the attributes suggested by the name. They were full of the spirit of independence. But, gradually, owing to the admixture of blood, loss of ruling power, domination of the Brahmins, etc., they lost their predominant position. Although they happened to lose the formal rites of Samskara, meanness of conduct or thought never touched them. They, being wise, educated, bright and energetic, still retain the purity and nobility of thought and conduct. In view of the objective of ' Samskara ', there is no doubt, they deserve the " Samskaras ". Considering their ancient glory and greatness, Nairs ought to maintain their self-respect and dignity unimpaired. On the material plane there have been rise and fall, but these do not matter. If they do, how can there be the feeling of brotherhood, and happiness?

Well, to resume the story, Swamiji passed the winter in the study of the books of Vedanta and the practice of spiritual sadhanas. When the summer came, Swamiji, whose eyes and heart had been charmed by the sights on the heights of the Himalayas and the sense of peace, feeling that it was the proper time, decided to go higher up into the mountains. He was healthy but weak owing to the kind of life he had been leading. He was living upon ' bhiksha ' obtained once a day and the Ganga water. Yet, regardless of the feebleness of the body, he started on an auspicious day, soon after Meshasamkranti (towards the middle of April) for Uttarkasi. An English

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knowing Brahmin youth from Tamil Nad named Natesan had been staying with Swamiji at Rishikesh. Being unattached to worldly affairs he had come to accept 'sanyasa' and to associate with enlightened people. As a disciple he accompanied Swamiji to Uttarkasi. They proceeded slowly via Mussori, Dhantoli and other places, enjoying the beauty of the landscapes and resting at wayside villages reaching their destination in six or seven days. On arrival Swamiji went to Kailas Mutt where he had stayed before. The manager of the Mutt recognised him and treated him with love and respect. So Swamiji cheerfully took up his abode there. There his mind was always cheerful, free from worries, tranquil and in a state of Divine concentration. The natural beauty of Soumyakasi, and the music of the Pranava sound (Om) arising from the Ganga, were such as to produce in his heart a feeling of peace and tranquillity. He tirelessly busied himself with the repetition of holy names (Japa) and meditation and the practice of Asanas, Pranayama, etc. Yet he found time, at the request of the sanyasins in the asram and two Brahmin sanyasins from Kerala, to narrate everyday the story of Santi Parva in the Mahabharata for the delight and elightenment of himself and others. He also taught Panchadasi to the Brahmacharin who was serving him and was eager to learn. At that holy spot days passed quickly being full of spiritual penance and happiness.

Around Uddalakasram, jamadagniasram, Kapilasram, Lake Nachiketha, Balakhilya cave, Mt. Varanavatha and other holy places near Uttarkasi, famous in the Vedas and the Smritis, many stories have spring up and they are still in circulation. Sometimes by himself and some times with others he engaged himself in an examination of the veracity of these stories. There is an ancient tradition which purports that the great sage Uddalaka referred to in the Chandogya Upanishad as having taught his son Swetaketu the great formula "Tatwamasi" nine times, Rishis Jamadagni and Kapila and thousands of Balakhilya Rishis of the size of the thumb resided at this place in the remote past. Swamiji examined this tradition in the light of reason. This is not the only place which boasts of such holy association. All over India, there are hundreds and thousands of 'theerthas'

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and rivers rich in such traditions. Any intelligent man can easily see that these stories have been invented to add to the holiness of such places and to win the credence of common people. If people begin to put faith in every cock and bull story, old or new, without critically examining its probability, what is the use of intelligence to man? Not only the God-given, natural power of thinking is lost, but also the thoughtless acceptance and blind imitation lead to one's own harm as well as to that of the society one lives in.

Thus he passed five or six months at Soumyakasi enjoying spiritual bliss free from all distractions, arising out of the contemplation of the world so full of attachment, hate, fear, etc. The life there was established in the glory of the Self and perfectly tranquil. As the number of the devotees who came seeking contact with the enlightened was very small, it was not usually necessary to turn the mind outward to speak to them. The natives of the region known as the 'Pahadis' inherit faith and devotion, but being uneducated and uncultured, evince no interest in the study of the scriptures or the discussion of philosophical principles. Still some of the educated ones among them do sometimes, as a matter of etiquette, pay visits to sanyasins.

One evening a German scholar, accompanied by his wife and a Government officer, came to Kailas Mutt to see Swamiji. With bowed heads they saluted him and he received them and offered them seats. Then they entered into conversation. In the course of the talk Swamiji enquired why they had come to India. Swamiji had not sufficient mastery over the English language to carry on a learned discussion in it and the scriptures. What he had learnt at school had almost been forgotten for want of use. Yet Swamiji began to talk with that eloquent scholar in English. The visitor replied to his query with great respect and humility "We have come all the way to India to see Mahatma Gandhi face to face, to get ours acquainted directly with the spiritual wealth of India, to visit the great Himalayas and the great saints dwelling on the sacred mountain. If we are able to do this, we shall deem the object of our life fulfilled". These sweet words befitting a real scholar coming from a

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foreigner filled Swamiji's mind with pride in the unequalled spiritual attainments of his motherland. "True indeed! If India has been able to acquire such a great reputation it is not because of her material wealth but because of the greatness of her spirituality—That is something unique. The greatness of material wealth is evanescent, charming at the start but sorrowful at the end. On the contrary, the wealth arising out of the realization of Truth is everlasting, uniformly beautiful and blissful. So it appears great and attractive to all," replied Swamiji in a tone full of pride and dignity, but not without humility. The discussion that followed touched upon several aspects of spiritual life. In the course of the discussion the visitor who was pure of mind and was well-versed in the philosophy of both the West and the East, and admired the spiritual knowledge of the people of the East, remarked "We of the West are unwise and indiscriminate, for we waste our life sailing in vain over the ocean, on whose bed priceless gems lie strewn. You of the East, on the contrary, are wise and fortunate because with courage and adventurous spirit you dive deep down under water and pocket those rare and invaluable stones, bring them up, enjoy them and render your life fruitful." This is a fact we, people of India, can be proud of. Even the great scholars of foreign lands come to our country and praise the ancient and singularly splendid culture of our Rishis with such respect and admiration while we Hindus take no pride in our own ancient, matchless spiritual tradition. We should be really ashamed, of this state of affairs. Our great Rishi of yore having learnt by long experimentation and experience, that material prosperity, however great, can not give us ultimate happiness, turned to spiritual perfection which alone can assure man of real, lasting bliss. So they devoted their lives solely and entirely to the attainment of that goal and reached it. What could be worse for our modern Indians than abandoning that spiritual way discovered by their ancients, the noblest and the best way suited to their genius and leading to eternal bliss and taking the opposite road—the materialistic way, mean and disastrous, dictated by nature and alien to their genius. The national leader of India ought to remember that the great glory

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acquired by their motherland as the birth place of Renunciation, Dispassion, Love and Knowledge will be lost by following the path of sense enjoyment which is common to all animals and which ultimately leads to sorrow. That German scholar who have given up materialistic civilization of the West which revels in creature comforts and luxuries, in order to enjoy the perfect, unexcelled, eternal bliss of the Self, on rising to leave, said with boundless joy and sense of satisfaction, " I have travelled practically all over the world but I have nowhere come across an atmosphere so spiritual and peaceful,. Here, on the bank of the Ganga, in the heart of the Himalayas the mind effortlessly fills with spirituality and becomes peaceful and concentrated. Hence our desire is to build a hut somewhere here with the permission of your Holiness and spend the rest of our life on this sacred spot. How fortunate are they who can spend a peaceful life immersed in this joy of spirituality!" Finding how much love and devotion had been evoked by the great culture of the Rishis leading to the realization of the human goal, in the mind of this man born and brought up in the midst of atheism, Swamiji felt immensely happy.

The rainy season ended, the dark clouds dispersed and the sky shone wonderful blue like Para Brahman with name and form. With the arrival of Autumn, all the muddiness of the Ganga disappeared, and the water became crystal clear. Now the Ganga was blue, the sky was blue, the dense forest appeared blue—thus everything connected with the Ganga looked blue. Poets usually refer to the whiteness of Ganga and the blueness of the Yamuna, but along the Himalayas this is only partially true. Below the Himalayas, the waters of the Ganga appear white.

On the arrival of Autumn, after spending two or three months in the rainy season on the verge of the mountain, Swamiji set out for Gangotri. Following the principle, "एकाकी विचरेन्नित्यं" this time he went out all alone. The way lay along beautiful mountain sides covered with trees in bud and blossom, and along the bank of the Ganga. Swamiji proceeded on his way enjoying the beauty of Nature and

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satisfying his hunger with a chance morsel now and then. Though the journey was really taxing, it filled his mind with feelings of pleasure. One day at noon he was sitting under a tree with nothing to appease his gnawing hunger. He was far away from human habitation. So he thought to himself: "What is God, who rules and maintains all the universe, going to do now? How is He going to feed me?" This was an opportunity he thought to find out how the creatures of the world are maintained. Lo! suddenly an aged Brahmin, a native of the mountains, was seen coming up. Approaching the helpless sanyasin sitting by the wayside exhausted and evidently distressed with hunger, the Brahmin prostrated himself before him and untying a small packet which he carried, took out a few boiled potatoes and placing them before Swamiji, said with folded hands, "Swamiji, you appear to be very hungry. There are no villages in the neighbourhood. So kindly accept these and satisfy your hunger. I brought them with me for my own use on the way. If it serves you, I shall be very happy." Now Swamiji could clearly see how God manages the universe in His wonderful way. He also learnt from this and similar incidents how full of faith and devotion the natives of the Himalayas (however ignorant) are towards Sanyasins.

At a place called Hariprayag, near Gangotri, the supermundane beauty of a wood full of deodar trees, charmed him. Here and there in the wood dwelt a few saints and sanyasins. Unfortunately, however, in the forests as in the towns, the number of sanyasins who lead an ideal life is small indeed. But, at the very first glance, Swamiji could see that the saints and sanyasins living on the banks of the Ganga up the Himalayas are not such common creatures as trees and grass. However, Swamiji could not spend more than a couple of days at that beautiful place, Gangotri, as there was no means of getting food. "Adequate arrangements should be made for food and then I must return to stay here for a longer time", resolving thus he retraced his steps though unwillingly. The rare and wonderful spirituality of the place fascinated him so completely that he decided to stay there for a long time enjoying the spiritual effulgence. He had a great desire to visit Gomukhi

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where the Ganga emerges into the open for the first time but for the time being he had to leave it, for lack of a guide, as the way to it was difficult and full of obstacles.

On the return journey from Gangotri, at a place called Bhaskaraprayag, he met a saintly person named Goswami Sri Ganesdatta Sastri who was on his way to Gangotri. He was the founder-secretary of the "Sanatana Dharma Pratinidhi Sabha" of the Punjab. At Uttarkasi he had heard about Swamiji, and was therefore very glad to meet him Goswami, with great devotion, prostrated himself before Swamiji placing several kinds of sweetmeats and ripe fruits at his feet. They spent some time discussing spiritual subjects. The friendship that thus sprang up between them in 1926 on the way to Gangotri, grew stronger and deeper as time passed."

On Swamiji's return from his second pilgrimage to Gangotri, he took up his abode at Kailas Mutt again. His life there was free from distractions.

In time, the Himalayan winter that tries the powers of endurance of even the people of endurance arrived. This year the winter was rather unprecedented in its rigour. Most sanyasins left for Rishikesh and other warmer places. As for Swamiji, he decided to put his powers of endurance to a test, His idea was to acquire thereby the strength to endure the snowfall at great heights on the Himalayas. He also desired to see for himself the solitary and beautiful moods of the Himalayas which can be experienced only in winter time. Really he had not then the physical strength to brave the extreme weather but he stayed on. Even in that benumbing cold he used to bathe in the Ganga everyday and carried on the study of the scriptures, meditation, etc., as usual. Perhaps his rigorous penance pleased Devendra who sent down showers of snowflakes, like shower of flowers in the month of Magh. It was indeed a rare sight to see snow coming down like whiffs of cotton. The snow-covered regions shining like molten silver in the bright sunlight justified the name of Himalaya (Home of snow). In front, behind, to the right, to the left, above, below—everywhere it was snow, snow, snow. On seeing this rare phenomenon, Swamiji's mind danced with joy. No bird

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stirs; no animal moves about, even man has become stock-still. The sight of this natural beauty could not satiate Swamiji. Even as the face is seen reflected in mirror, he found the Self reflected in Nature. Revelling repeatedly and long in such natural beauty the mind will finally turn to the creator. Forgetting all the external world it will get immersed in the thought of the Auspicious One. The winter at Uttarkasi so helpful to keep off distractions, was passed chiefly in mental concentration. Advaita (monism) alone can assure an aspirant for Liberation that bliss and peace that he desires; dwaita (dualism) can not afford him that. Dwaita is not eternal; it is not endless or blissful. For, potness can be found only in the pot, not in the cloth. Besides, when the pot or the cloth is broken or torn into two, space and time which divide them, come between them. Dwaita, being dependent like the pot, etc., on agencies like subject object, etc., is never free. Advaita, on the contrary, depends on no agencies. It is beyond time and space. It is pure, unmoving and immovable. It alone is therefore true, eternal, auspicious, beautiful, infinite and wholly independent. Dwaita which is the cause of endless sorrows and miseries hardly deserves to behold Advaita face to face. Advaita, which is homogeneous and is of the nature of everlasting peace, is of all beautiful conceptions, the most beautiful and desirable to all mankind. Even as the mind becomes one with love, aversion and mercy according to the sights before the eye, it attains the highest happiness from the joy of the self by ascending the peak of Advaita. The enlightened and liberated soul withdraws the mind from all external activities and surrendering itself at the feet of the Supreme Lord rises above all thought and attains the state of Supreme bliss. Thus imbibing the elixir of joy from the beautiful sights of the Himalayas, Swamiji lost the dual consciousness and immersed himself in the ocean of Advaita so much so, that he was hardly aware of the hardships caused by the snowfall.

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CHAPTER 5

It was the time of the Kumbha Mela at Hardwar. Hundreds of thousands of people, belonging to all stations of life, were converging upon the holy spot. Generally people attend these 'melas' either because others do so or because of the curiosity to see extraordinary things. Few indeed are those good people who do so out of sincere piety or out of the desire to associate themselves with good people. At a Kumbha Mela, one can see men and women roaming about uttering exclamations of wonder. Not knowing what is good and what is evil, what is one's duty and what is not, people labour under the illusion that entertainment and amusement produce good. Some people who esteem themselves as men of 'dharma' install the Devil Adharma on the throne of Dharma and worship him. Really the first thing one ought to achieve is the ability to discriminate between dharma and adharma. Truth, Self-control, etc., are to be followed. Only then will dharma arise. For lack of noble 'Acharyas' and proper dharmic (religious) teaching the dissemination of 'dharma' has suffered seriously. Dharma is not for the pleasure of the doer, nor is the doer for the pleasure of dharma—this is an accepted principle everyone ought to remember and follow. We need not follow a loathsome custom simply because it is ancient. Only after due testing and necessary modification should one accept a custom. This is a principle to be borne in mind.

Swamiji scored a spiritual triumph by wintering at Uttarkasi without difficulty. Some days before the Maha Sivarathri, he set out for Hardwar in the company of three or four sanyasins who had become his friends and the Brahmacharin. To participate in the great 'mela' which was going to take place there ere long, the like of which he had never seen before, was his motive. Climbing up and climbing down mountains he reached Rishikesh via Narendra nagar and put himself up at the Kailas asrama for two or three days. Then he shifted to a solitary hut owned by the Dakshinathya Sadhu Mandali. He spent a few happy days in the hut. At Rishikesh too he met large numbers of sanyasins and householders, both men

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and women, going to Hardwar. It looked as if Rishikesh and Hardwar were amalgamated into one big city, because of the boisterous crowds now linking them. Finding that the pilgrims from Kerala and Tamilnad outnumbered the pilgrims from other provinces, Swamiji's heart filled with affection, joy and pride. As the day of the holy bath of the Kumbha Mela drew near he went to Hardwar and there with the Brahmacharin took up his residence at the Kailas Mutt.

The whole place was terribly over-crowded. The environments that distract all the senses and the atmosphere could, in no way, be congenial to the peace-loving sanyasins who had spent years and years in solitude. Even a single day's stay at such a place was intolerable to Swamiji but he had to spend five or six days there yielding to the pressure of his sanyasin friends. During the stay he went to Kankhal and other holy places famous in history and legend, met many great sanyasins, visited their asrams and listened to the discourses based on the stories of the Lord, held in them. The sight of the crowds of sanyasins wearing their distinguishing robes and other signs and belonging to different orders, filled Swamiji with interest and wonder. They were encamped on the sand bank of the Ganga. In the heart of a forest nearly he came across some avadhutas, elephantine in their size. They were embodiments of dispassion. He approached them with humility and love and entered into conversation with them. For hours they discussed subjects like knowledge of the Supreme Self dispassion, and renunciation. On another day, with childlike curiosity he entered the Sanatana Dharma Maha Sabha. There, by sheer chance, he met old friends like Goswami, who received him respectfully and gave him a seat of honour on the dais. At the meeting he listened to the speeches of religious leaders like Pandit Madan Mohan Malavya, and zealous missionaries like Sri Swami Jayendrapuri. He fully appreciated their ardent faith. But the speeches delivered by certain others failed to elicit his admiration. They bore no signs of independent and logical thinking. Like the parrot they were simply echoing the verses of the Srutis and Smritis. The critical section of the audience did not like their speeches, it was clear. At noon,

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the sadhus were treated to a luxurious feast. With his companions Swamiji too went to the place where the feast was held and saw sights, attractive and repellant, laudable and ridiculous. The wrangling by the sadhus for their share of the sweet meats, would have made one suppose that the scriptures had enjoined sanyasa covetable even to the gods, to enable certain people cram their bellies with laddus, jilebis and other sweet meats and thus enjoy themselves and that sanyasins should not, therefore, on any account miss such an opportunity and that such meals are held especially for this purpose. Swamiji went round seeing such sights. At last, the first day of the bath in the month of Meda (April-May) came. The place looked like a sea of human beings whose number went into millions. Enduring discomforts he had never experienced before, Swamiji too managed to dip himself in the famous Brahmakunda. People believe that only those who have done immense good in previous lives can have a holy bath at such a place and time and that the bath, produces great merit. Various Orders of sanyasins, wearing their distinctive apparel, led by their 'Mandaleswars,' came in spectacular processions to have their ceremonial bath in the Brahmakunda. There are lakhs upon lakhs of sanyasins in India, depending upon 'bhiksha' and wandering up and down the country. Swamiji was glad to see some of them together at Hardwar. Critics sometimes ask "How many in this gathering, drawn from every nook and corner of India, are real sanyasins, rich in discrimination, dispassion, control of the body and mind, etc.?" Let me here request the leading sages of India to consider whether the multiplication of the number of sanyasins living upon bhiksha shows a rise or fall in the spiritual life of the land whether it shows her prosperity or adversity or whether it is caused by her fortune or misfortune.

Water always seeks to rest at a lower level, even so, man desires to live a care-free life. Many, who faced with difficulties, find life full of sorrow, seek an easy relief by taking refuge in the life of a Sanyasin, which is at broad as a royal road and honoured by time. It is not generally out of an ardent desire for Liberation, but out of disappointment and despair owing to

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failure in life that most people renounce their homes, their relations and friends and take to the life of a wandering mendicant living upon alms. Their number is ever on the increase. This practice does not tend to raise 'sanyasa' in public estimation; it only brings down ridicule and contempt upon the institution. How can the entry of unqualified people be prevented? What is the way to distinguish the qualified from the unqualified? This question has been known to engage the attention of the leaders of religion for a pretty long time. Once, when Sri Malavyaji who spared no pains in his effort to resuscitate Hinduism in all her ancient glory came to see Swamiji at his hut with two other learned men, their discussion naturally veered round to this problem. "What is the rod to measure the qualification or the disqualification of a person to enter a sanyasin's life? The discussion was long, but not decisive. It may be right for qualified sanyasins to seek bhiksha at the doors of householders, but in the changed circumstances of our time, is it proper to do so? This also is a problem deserving the attention of reformers. If somebody contends that the entire system has to be reformed in view of the fact that the dharma of not only sanyasins but also of householders has very much degenerated, who can say "nay"? Since the subject is not the present topic of discussion, there is no point in dealing with it here at greater length. Something is said by the way, that is all. In short, if one overcomes the desire for the pleasures of the senses, destroys the enemy Desire, and leads the life of a householder endeavouring to realize the Supreme Truth, there is nothing wrong at all. Therefore, man, show all your manliness in acquiring the Divine qualities. Go no, try! Don't hanker after a sanyasin's way of life. If chance falls to you to become a sanyasin well and good, become a sanyasin.

The day after Swamiji had the sacred "Kumbha bath" in the proper way, he decided to leave for Kashmir in order to escape from the crowd. As the entire place was deluged with people it was equally difficult to stay on there on to leave. But somehow, in the company the surging crowds he got into the brahmacharin, Natesan. They first alighted at Amritsar and passed three or four days at an asram which they came across

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by mere chance. They saw all the remarkable sights in the neighbourhood. The Golden Temple of the Sikhs was close-by. Swamiji visited again and again that great temple surrounded by a lake full of crystal clear water and praised by every visitor for its celestial beauty. The visits filled Swamiji's heart with wonder and joy. At the temple he paid his homage to Guru Nanak who had declared in unequivocal terms the equality of mankind, who had asserted that there is only one caste—the caste of man. It was the enlightened Guru Nanak, who like Sri Buddha and Sri Sankara, taught love, cheerfulness, renunciation and devotion to Self, that declared that even the Vedas have not fully understood the greatness of sanyasins; that sanyasin is God Himself. Having prostrated himself to the great guru again and again he left Amritsar. On the way he visited ancient Lavapura (Lahore), passed two or three days at Sri Seethala mandir and reached Rawalpindi by train. In that big and prosperous town, he stayed for some days in a solitary garden called "Thapovana" outside the city. He could easily maintain himself on 'madhukari bhiksha'.. He also accepted the food brought to his hut by devotees. In addition to all this there was the hospitality of a Malayali sanyasin who had been staying for long in that garden. That Swamiji was well versed in English and was the embodiment of love. So he was an object of veneration for the natives. Many devotees used to come to him. He was living all alone, cooking his own food. As he felt great respect for the fellow sanyasin from Kerala, he cooked the usual curries of Malabar for him. Swamiji enjoyed his life at the place and passed the whole of Spring there. Then, with the help of some devotees, he started for the capital of Kashmir, Srinagar, by bus. The way lay over beautiful hills and dales and at the end of two days he reached his destination. The first two or three days he spent at Narayana Mutt and the rest at the Durganag Mutt of Sri Sivaratna Swami. The capital of Kashmir, often spoken of as the Paradise on Earth, with its measureless and rare beauty, delighted him. Whose mind will not get intoxicated with such unique natural beauty? This was even dear to the lovers of sensuous pleasure and wealthy emperor as well as to men

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of dispassion and renunciation, to penniless sanyasins and seers of Self. It is so still and it will continue to be so. That is the special glory of Kashmir. A climate congenial to physical health, the plenitude of vegetables and other items of food, the presence of beautiful lakes and gardens, and of forest full of rare flowers, creepers, climbers, trees, etc,—all there render the town dear to worldlings. At the same time, the great splendour and variety of Natural beauty and the tranquil atmosphere that ever reminds man of the great creator, attract and delight sanyasins. The wealth of the place was such as to fully justify the name of the capital of Kashmir. Here and there it was full of things pleasing to the senses; here and there lands lay scorching in the sun. Some places were full of water and vegetation; elsewhere, it was arid and barren. The mountainous district presented sights attractively golden as well as forbiddingly dark and rocky. Kashmir which has been for long the abode of sanyasins and which is rich in all precious things shines as the centre of wealth and splendour, not only of India but of all the world.

One morning, after the usual bath and acts of devotion, Swamiji was sitting outside the Durgamandir discussing spiritual subjects with some sanyasins and householders. It was about nine O' clock. Just then a middle-aged Kashmiri Brahmin, after worshipping at the temple, came to Swamiji, saluted him respectfully, and seated himself near him. Swamiji exchanged greetings with him. He was a teacher of grammar and philology and a student of Vedanta. They began to talk in elegant Sanskrit. A great scholar who delighted in the association with enlightened people, requested Swamiji to explain the well-known Vedantic aphorism "आनन्दमयोऽभ्यासात्" Depending on his memory and his intuition, the Svamin set forth the sense of the aphorism. Thus in a spirit of amity and with a view solely to deciding and contemplating the truth (of the matter) there took place a good discussion on the relevant section (of the Vedantic Sutras). There was not, even in the slightest degree, the spirit of contentiousness and the desire for success in debate. The view that Brahman is blissful is not tenable. The section sets forth

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the Upanisadic tenet that Brahman is 'the tail' or 'foundation' i.e., *puccha*)—so maintains Sankara. Those who share this view explain the aphorism adding a few more words (thereto) in the spirit of the following observations in the *Parimala*. The word *anandamaya* or blissful in the aphorism connotes Brahman 'the tail' which is repeatedly referred to by the term 'anandamaya'. The addition of words is (resorted to) because Brahman is the major theme of discussion". Now the opponents may query. Why has not the aphorism been formulated as:—Brahman is the tail 'as there is repetition? Indeed, it is well known that this section on '*Anandamaya*' in the philosophy of Vedanta is a bone of contention among savants who are proud of their scholarship, and that the cry themselves hoarse on it.

Yet that learned Brahmin seemed satisfied with Swamiji's explanation. Thus engaging himself in discussion of the Supreme Truth and enjoying the celestial beauties around him, Swamiji passed two or three weeks there. Then he decided to visit the temple of Sarada which stands in a solitary region. The temple is the pride of Kashmir. As the place where Sri Sankara ascended the throne of Omniscience it has become justly and widely famous. The way to the temple was almost impassable but Swamiji had decided to spend some time there in meditation. So Swamiji who had no possessions of his own, but was lord of everything, made preparation to start for the temple on an auspicious day early in Jyeshta (May-June). On the evening before the proposed journey he was out on an evening stroll when a messenger from the Maharaja of Alwar who was then camping in Srinagar approached Natesan and told him respectfully "His Highness desires to see the Swamiji from Rishikesh. If Swamiji is pleased to meet His Highness, a car will be sent tomorrow to fetch him to the royal residence". The disciple communicated the information to his master but as Swamiji had already fixed his programme he did not want to alter it. He was, by nature, averse to such audiences. Therefore giving up the chance of getting acquainted with His Highness, Swamiji departed at the fixed hour. On the way he rested two days in a temple at Sopuram on the bank of the Vitasta.

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A Dandiswami, a native of the region, too was then staying in the temple. On the second day at noon a brahmin proud of his erudition, came to see him. He had learnt Sanskrit at Varanasi and was proud and arrogant. Coming to Swamiji and greeting him, he seated himself near him and putting on the airs of a conqueror began to ply him with questions. Swamiji gave him apt, though brief, replies to his questions. But the captious youngman began to pester him with more and more absurd questions. Swamiji retained his equanimity and answered the questions now and then in a few words but more often remained silent, for Swamiji heartily disliked arguing for victory. He was almost afraid of sound and fury signifying nothing. It was ever his firm conviction that heated debates lead only to breach of peace and can never lead to the discovery of Truth. The young man, finding Swamiji as unexcited and unmoved as a tree, in the face of overwhelming provocation, was struck with wonder. In all humility prostrating himself again and again before Swamiji, the young man cried out, "Excuse me, please excuse me. Pardon my presumption Pardon my impertinence. It is because saints like you are embodiments of patience that childish people like us, like jackals before lions, disport ourselves before them". On returning home the young man with genuine devotion brought some food to Swamiji. Since then, every now and then, he brought offerings of sweetmeats and ripe fruits to him.

After spending a few days there, Swamiji resumed his journey. Passing through gardens full of rare and strange plants, trees pleasing to all the senses, and crossing extensive fields, in three or four days reached a beautiful village called Rudravanom to the North East of the Kashmir plain. There he spent two happy days at the house of a Brahmin who respected sanyasins and loved to associate himself with them. Then he crossed a snow covered mountain and picked his way through dark forests thick with 'deodar' trees. Rarely though, he came across some lovely village. Proceeding along the northern bank of the Sri Krishna Ganga, a tributary of the Vitasta, he reached the Sri Sarada temple in two or three days. For seers of God, drunk with Divine love, no sorrow will appear as painful.

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He took up his abode in a corner of that extensive and beautiful temple. He worshipped Goddess Sri Sarada, Mother of the Universe, whose nature is knowledge and whose form is of the Vedas. Brahman, birthless, undecaying and deathless, the One without a second, alone is true; everything else is unreal, illusory. In the eyes of him who knows the Truth, who knows that everything that people worship is only a different aspect of Brahman, the differences in conception as God or Goddess, one as big the other as small, lose all significance and relevancy.

Close to the temple there are one or two Brahmin houses; further off there are a few Mahomedan homes. At some distance from the temple there is an old fort. A few policemen camp there. Swamiji received his 'bhiksha' regularly from the house of the chief Priest. The head of the Durganag Mutt had already informed the Chief Priest about Swamiji's visit and requested him to render him all help and service. Perhaps because of that or perhaps because of the good character and behaviour of Swamiji himself, the Brahmin and his entire family looked after him and attended to his needs with sincere devotion. Thus all the circumstances were in favour of a peaceful and happy life of devotion. Without a thought of the outside world, Swamiji passed his days in bliss devoting himself to the great Goddess by word, deed and thought. The teaching of Panchadasi and other books on Vedanta also continued without break. In the evening, for a little diversion, he would go out and wander among the groves of trees nearby for an hour or two. Presently Natesan had an attack of dysentery. For medical treatment he went to a village below Rudravanom, in search of a Kashmiri Physician with whom he had got acquainted on the way. Thus left alone without anyone to help him he continued to worship of the Mother Goddess without let or hindrance. By the grace of the Holy Mother, Natesan recovered quickly and returned to Swamiji. For several weeks Swamiji had been getting his bhiksha from the same family. He felt rather uneasy on that score but there was no way to get over the difficulty. An ideal sanyasin, he had no possessions and did not receive valuable gifts from any one. As there were no Hindu homes in the neighbourhood it was not possbile

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to obtain bhiksha anywhere else. In these circumstances, he felt, there was no alternative but to leave the place so dear to him. While he was thus seriously thinking of leaving the spot, one afternoon, while he was engaged in teaching Vedanta, a youngman, dressed in western style, but full of humility and devotion to Sadhus, came to pay his respects to Swamiji. He was a Punjabi millionaire who was carrying on business in Kashmir as a contractor dealing in deodar and other valuable timber. He was now on an inspection tour. In the course of his tour he has heard about Swamiji and wanted to see him. Swamiji received him kindly and directed him to a seat closeby. A conversation on spiritual and religious subjects followed. After some time the youngman, rising to go, said, "It is all the merit I earned in my previous lives that gave me this chance to have your holy 'darshan'. I needn't say that the mere sight of such holy people as you, is an elixir to people like me lying in a deadly stupor of worldliness. Before long I will return to see you again." So saying he respectfully took leave of Swamiji. Going to the chief priest he told him respectfully, "So long as Swamiji chooses to stay here, provide him with good food and render him any service that he needs. Today itself I shall be sending to you from my camp all necessary provisions in adequate quantities." The generous Brahmin who had been doing everything even before to minister to Swamiji's needs, readily complied. Later, when his host told Swamiji all this, Swamiji wondered at the Divine mercy that works itself out in unthought of forms and mysterious ways. He then gave up the thought of leaving the Temple. Now, instead of the old dry bread he began to receive tasteful dishes. So, by the grace of the great Goddess, who is ever attentive to the needs of her devotees, Swamiji was enabled to continue his stay there and perform his arduous 'tapasya' with complete mental concentration.

As it was the place where Sri Sankara mounted the Throne of Omniscience, Swamiji used to remember the great Acharya always. When Sri Sankara reached the southern tower of the Sri Sarada Temple and got ready to open the gate and enter, the Pundits stopped him. In the debate that followed on the

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holy scriptures the great Acharya easily overcame all his antagonists. Having made all of them admit defeat, without further ado, he ascended the Throne of Omniscience. Such is the story found in Sankara Digvijaya. From such historical episodes we can naturally infer that Kashmir was, at one time, the home of great scholars skilled in all the scriptures and the sciences; besides it was a seat of learning of universal fame. That was why Sri Sankara who had embarked upon a campaign of universal conquest visited Kashmir, Badarikasrama etc. and held debates with men of supreme learning. Well, in this context, the principles that Sri Sankara established for the good of mankind after vanquishing all his antagonists in argument with quotations from the Vedas and logical reasoning may be briefly summarised here for the benefit of the readers:

In truth there is no difference between Jeevatma (Individual Self) and Paramatma (Supreme Self); their difference is the product of adjuncts. All Vedantic texts insist upon their unity. Neither experience, nor inference or anything else can disprove what is asserted in words like " Tat twam Asi ". The advocates of work (karma) argue, as there is no use of stating something already established, the words of the Sruti can not mean that; their purpose must be to state what is yet to be established. This view is incorrect. On realizing a stump to be a stump the fear of thief arising out of misapprehension vanishes. Similarly, the fear of snake vanishes when the piece of rope is found to be no more than a rope. Like this one attains Liberation from all wordly sorrows on realizing the unity of Jeevatma (Individual Self) and Paramatma (Supreme Self). Worldly sorrows and joys are the result of ignorance. Only true knowledge will eliminate them, once and for all. Worship, however long, or work, however hard, can not destroy it. The solemn assertions of Vedanta such as तरति शोकमात्मवित् तमेवविदित्वामृत्यु "make it clear that true knowledge is the means of Liberation. Ignorance (अविद्य) is the natural superimposition of the contraries, object and subject, matter and spirit. Darkness and light and their properties can never become identical; yet, in experience, we do find some such identification. All work,

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wordly or Vedic, stem out of this mighty superimposition. It is the man who entertains notions like "I" and "mine" that becomes the knower with the means of knowledge, object of knowledge etc. Means of valid knowledge like experience, inference etc., and positive and negative directions found in the Vedas are all for men of ignorance, not for the enlightened. It is for the annihilation of avidya that the knowledge of Non-dual Self has been introduced. That is the purpose of the Vedas. In sanyasa characterised by self-restraint sravana (listening to the holy texts, discourses etc.) is of the utmost importance. Work (action) and parts of work are therefore to be rejected. That is the purport of the Upanishads. All the Vedas deal with Brahman directly or indirectly. Abidance in Brahman is the only way to Liberation; there is no other—This is the assertion of Vedanta. Dwaita (which consists of action, agency, effect etc.) is by nature, illusory. Advaita alone is true. Sincere seekers of Liberation should, be all means avoid all ignorant thoughtless yet noisy critics of Vedanta which alone is pure and logical, transcending all illusion.

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CHAPTER 6

In that holy temple of Sri Sarada, on a peak of the Himalayas, Swamiji spent a month and a half, experiencing the unbroken joy of God-realization. At the end of the period he left the temple as he desired to visit the holy Amarnath, another favourite centre of pilgrimage, that year itself. When, after prostrating himself before Sri Sarada, he came out with the brahmacharin, he found a large number of people including all the members of the brahmin family waiting there to bid him good bye. With great love they accompanied him to the Krishna Ganga, thinking of those happy days they were associated with him. The women folk too came out of their homes watching the departing holy man with tearful eyes. Even brutes return love for love, then why wonder if men and women were moved by affection? Ordinary people, even while they hate, wish for friendship and love from others, just as people indulging in sin, look for the fruits of merit. That certainly is illogical. Love all, love everything, love always. To make this world a place of love there is no other way.

On the way he reached Rudravana. From there the path lay through groves and fields. The region with its beautiful, huge trees and human dwellings strongly reminds one of Kerala. Enjoying the sights on the way Swamiji moved slowly towards the holy place Ksheerabhavani which he reached in a few days. On this journey he came across two or three peaceful 'mutts of brahmacharins' standing in groves of trees adorned with sweet fruits and flowers. He rested at these 'mutts' for a number of days. The heads of the mutts received him and generously entertained him. From one of them, a native brahmacharin, learned and devout, followed Swamiji in his eagerness to associate with enlightened persons. His company proved very useful. He was familar with the entire district. His company and his efforts procured them food and lodging, without difficulty. Swamiji was pleased to see that the Muslims of Kashmir were free from the feeling of hatred and the practices of untouchability unlike their co-religionists in other places and that they and the native brahmins lived like kinsmen with

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mutual affection. The brahmins of the place and their conduct deserve every praise. Swamiji felt so and he never made at secret of his opinion. Our great Rishis of yore who were seers of Truth taught us."

सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म

(All that we see is Brahma),

"ब्रह्मैवेदममृतं पुरस्ताद् ब्रह्म पश्चाद् ब्रह्म दक्षिणतश्चोत्तरेण"

(It is Brahma who is free from decay and death, that is in front of us, to the right and left of us) but now their dear motherland is the home of despicable customs, fruits of the poisonous tree of inequality. How these customs came into vogue nobody knows. The she-demon, Hindu custom, assuming any form at will, without any difinite shape or manner of her own, goes about every place freely without fear or shame. Alas! Think how customs get the better of man and enslave him! Every intelligent man ought to know that customs are made for man, not man for customs.

After spending two days at Ksheerabhavani, Swamiji reached Srinagar by boat. Here, the blooming red lotuses impart a red glow to the crystal clear water of the lakes, captivating the hearts of even Sanyasins who have studiously cultivated the spirit of detachment and dispassion. During his boat journey along the lovely lakes, Swamiji, noticing the beautiful landscapes all around remembered the boat journeys along the rivers of Kerala. As there was no vacant room in Durganag mutt he stayed at a tent attached to it for a few days to get over fatigue. Several sanyasins on their way to Amarnath were lodging there. It is a fact, most sanyasins, wherever they are, look outward than inward. Sincere students of the scriptures are few. Fewer still are the sanyasins who have turned their gaze inward and have obtained the vision of God. At Amarnath, the 'darshan' on the full Moon day of the month of Sravan (July-August) is considered the most sacred. On the day the whole place is thronged with sanyasins and house-holders. Srinagar too was crowded with these pilgrims. When

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they started for Amarnath Swamiji joined them with Natesan. En route he paid visits to holy temples like Anantanag, followed the bank of the Dugdha Ganga, spent two days on a beautiful plain, rested and with refreshed spirits resumed the journey, enjoying the mountain scenery all along. In the course of the journey he happened to meet some sanyasins from Bengal and Kerala. Being already acquainted with Swamiji some of them were ready to render him any service. So he experienced no hardships in the procurement of food or in the matter of rest on the way. The track he had to follow was difficult but he proceeded without unpleasant experiences and reached Seshnag at last. There, in the milkwhite water of the very beautiful, very extensive and unbearably cold lake, he bathed with devotion. He passed a night on that plain surrounded by high, snow-covered mountains on all sides. Next day he reached another famous plain called Panchatarangini. No eye will be satiated with the beauty of its appearance and no words can do justice to its loveliness. The far-famed cave of Amarnath is quite close to it. Before noon next day he reached that magnificent place on the bank of the Amara Ganga. The whole place was crowded with devotees. Swamiji too entered the cave though with great difficulty.

Swamiji saw the Lord of Amarnath who confers immortality of man, in the form of frozen ice and felt blessed. He also worshipped the other gods and goddesses appearing in the cave in the form of ice, offering them flowers of all shapes and hues. He was filled with wonder at the sight of the beautiful objects around him. The enlightened ones say that though the entire world of movables and immovables is unreal, as forms of the Supreme Self they are real. So, even a blade of grass deserves our respect. For those who have understood the truth of the saying "ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं" all this is perfectly clear. For such people, pilgrimage is but a diversion. At Amarnath Swamiji came across a saintly person who had arrived there a month earlier and was doing tapas in a peaceful cave. Swamiji had already made his acquaintance at Uttarkasi and so the accidental meeting astonished and pleased him. On Swamiji's

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return the sadhu accompanied him to the borders of the city of Srinagar. On the return trek also, Swamiji with his companions bathed in the lake of Seshanag and performed all the traditional rites with devotion. Then he parted from them and accompanied only by Natesan set out for Gautamnag. By 6 O' clock in the evening he reached a well known "Mutt" of brahmacharins. The mutt was reputed for service to sanyasins. His plan was to rest there for a while. The brahmin sanyasins of the Mutt received him respectfully and offered him flowers, etc. Sitting on a Cot on the second floor they began to converse. All on a sudden, a serious minded Kashmiri Pundit, as if impatient with idle talk, sprang a question upon Swamiji. "From your very look, it is clear you are a very learned man. Please explain to us, therefore, what is meant by "Kalathyayapadishtom (कालात्ययापदिष्टम्) At this meant altogether unexpected question Swamiji felt as if he had been stung by a mosquito. It was sheer nuisance if not impertinence itself. He was very much exhausted with the journey and a craving for rest was what was uppermost in his mind. On the spur of the moment Swamiji replied: "Alas! No place seems to be altogether free from fellows proud of their bits of learning, perverts whose intelligence has been dimmed with pride. They have no tact, no patience, no peace of mind. It is not yet ten minutes since I reached here after an exhausting travel. Yet you seem bent upon bothering me with such discussion. What I want now is not 'questions and answers', debate or argument. It is rather strange that you don't understand even such simple things." The rebuke, it seems, went home to the Pundit. With folded hands he begged Swamiji's pardon. "Pease pardon me, pardon me for my impertinence". He soon withdrew from that presence to bring ripe fruits, roots etc., for Swamiji. Next day, at noon, after lunch, the Pundit came to Swamiji again and prostrated himself with humility and seated himself near Swamiji. Swamiji then with great consideration explained the expression according to the sastras. "In ancient books like the Nvayadarshana "Kālāthyayāpadishtom" is included among 'Hetwabhāsās' or fallacies. The

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moderns are familiar with it under the name "Bādhita" (refutation). Even men of ordinary learning know is nature. In Gautama Sutra, it is defined as "कालात्ययापदिष्टः कालानीत इति" Swamiji then went on elaborating the comments of Vatsyayana and Udyotakāra on the subject. Thus he cleared all doubt and fully satisfied the interrogator.

Swamiji spent a few days there agreeably. Every day, early in the morning, he had his bath in the famous theertha "Gautamkunda", took part in interesting discussions, and accepted the humble offerings of the inmates of the asram. After that short but happy stay, he set out for Srinagar via Anantanag. At the capital of Kashmir he spent some happy days in a lovely hut in the corner of a garden belonging to Narayana Mutt. It was a Kashmiri Brahmin judge named Janakeenath that made all arrangements for his stay at Srinagar on this occasion. Kashmir is a lovely state, but it appeared immersed in worldly enjoyments. The atmosphere of the state did not appear congenial to Sanyasins, or for spiritual life as a whole.

Now it was Autumn. During the period of Navarathri Swamiji left Srinagar and by himself travelled by motor bus to Jambu Nagar. It was a Punjabee devotee who lived in the town that had made all convenient arrangements for the journey. The brahmacharin who followed Swamiji was more eager to receive the ochre-coloured robe from Swamiji than to acquire the knowledge of Brahman. Failing to get the robes from Swamiji, he felt disappointed. So he decided to go back to Rishikesh and with this purpose he lingered at the place. Swamiji was averse to multiplying the number of sanyasins living upon bhiksha. So he did not like to encourage able bodied young men to take to sanyasa and wander up and down the country, doing nothing useful. Naturally, those sanyasins who entered the fold to live upon bhiksha, out of contempt for life arising from detachment or attachment, were not on good terms with him.

At Jambu Swamiji rested two or three days at the famous temple of Raghunath. Hoping to get bhiksha from the temple

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he took no steps on the first day to obtain food and sat where he was. It was already afternoon and there was no sign of any food. Swamiji did not get up from his seat or make any effort to appease his hunger. He sat there wondering how Lord Rama was going to provide for him. It was now past 4 O' clock. At that untimely hour some householders with their women came there from somewhere and began to cook food. When the cooking was over they placed enough of everything on a tray and brought it to him with a humble request "Please take this food". It is a common experience of the faithful that the merciful Lord fulfils the wishes of his true devotees in unexpected and mysterious ways. So there was nothing surprising in what happened that day. Swamiji, travelling alone soon reached Rishikesh by train.

Even ugly things become dear to us be long association. Similarly, lonely travel, without home, money or relations, too becomes dear to us in time, by long practice. Living in a solitary forest without help and travelling without valuable possessions are trifles and are easily within one's reach. But, the establishment in the Self is far more difficult and beyond easy achievement. A man may live on a peak or at a holy theertha or he may stay at his own house or in his own village. It is immaterial. What really matters is whether the mind remains fixed in the supreme Self night and day. "These saintly men live in solitude without any possessions of their own. Blessed indeed are they." So do the men about town praise such sadhus. But they never care to examine whether such men are truly devoted to God. Wild animals like the tiger and the bear too live in mountain caves without any possessions of their own. They are certainly not seers of Truth or lovers of God or possessors of uncommon virtues. Hence, O Man, forget not your true Self. Try to remember It ever. It is that alone that shines through all creatures, movable and immovable. It alone is the way to cross the sea of worldliness and enjoy supreme bliss. Everything else is illusion.

On reaching Rishikesh it was at a place called Nayajhadi that Swamiji took up his residence. There Sri Govindagiri, a devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi, of whom mention has

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already been made, had built an asram and called it Ramanasram. He was eager to serve Swamiji as well. In that dilapidated hut on the bank of the Ganga he passed a few days without any worry. Then, as there was no alternative, he shifted to a neighbouring hut. In that old, decayed crumbling hut there was room only for a single person to stretch himself but with the loving co-operation of other sadhus he repaired the hut and made it habitable. He lived there in the joy of Self, eternal, unsurpassed, beyond the reach of the senses. Everyday after bath, worship etc., at the request of two Malayalee Sadhus belonging to the Sri Ramakrishna order and a few other sanyasins, Swamiji devoted himself for two hours to the teaching of the Upanishads and other works on Vedanta. At the same time he regularly attended the discourses held at Kailasasrama on Brihadaranayaka Bhashya. Thus days passed happily in spiritual discussions and the vision of the Self. Even in the benumbing cold he had his bath in the Ganga early every morning; he satisfied himself with food once a day, obtained by himself through bhiksha. He passed his days in solitude. He rejected even the offerings of the necessaries of life brought by his devotees. He seldom moved out of his residence and declined to attend the receptions accorded to other sadhus or partake of feasts. He spoke little. In view of these habits and the strict observance of monastic rules, other sadhus began to refer to him respectfully as "Viraktan" (man of no attachment). Alas! how can people at a single glance judge whether a person is attached or detached in spirit? Still it is the habit with people to form an opinion of others with startling suddenness. Let people speak of a person as attached or detached, sanyasin or worldling, according to their own judgment; it will not and cannot affect the man of true dispassion. Yet, in a place like Rishikesh thronged with thousands of sadhus and their devotees, Swamiji's fame gradually began to spread. It is true Swamiji dislikes boasting yet he is compelled by context to make statements which would smack of self-exaltation. Boasting is a sin and Swamiji was ever eager to avoid it. Yet if he is constrained to say things which would sound as self-praise, readers will, in their magnanimity forgive him.

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The most prominent among the sanyasins of Rishikesh at the time, for their erudition as well as character, were Sri Advaitananda Swami of Gujerat, Sri Swayanjyothi Swami, Sri Sivananda Swami of Tamilnad and Sri Krishnacharya Swami far-famed as a great Sanskrit scholar. They became Swamiji's intimate friends. Swamiji had made his acquaintance with Swami Sri Sivananda, the famous Founder-President of Divine Life Society, as early as when Swamiji stayed in Brahmanandasrama. Once while Swamiji was residing somewhere below Brahmanandasrama, Sri Sivanandaji came to him one day at noon and said in English "A Bengali Sadhu is residing with me. For the last few days he has been very ill. Just to give him I want a little milk. I have been going from asram to asram for a few ounces. But it has not been available. There is no way to get it except on payment from some shop. If only I had two annas" Sri Tapovanji too had been depending entirely on bhiksha. He kept no pie of his own. Yet, somehow, he managed to get four annas and with humble prostrations handed it over to Swami Sivananda, praising his great kindness and love of service. Swamiji wholeheartedly admired and respected Swami Sivananda for his loving acts of kindness and noble qualities. When Swamiji met such friends, they carried on discussions on Vedanta. One evening two sanyasins came to Swamiji and in the course of the conversation asked him with due reverence, "Among the ancient Acharyas some say that there is a state called Jivanmukti; others deny it. We should like to know Swamiji's view on the matter." As answer to the question, Swamiji dealt briefly but clearly with the arguments in favour of Jivanmukti.

"I am happy, I am unhappy. My son is dead. My money is lost. I am is great straits"—Such states of worldliness are common to all unenlightened ones. Similarly, "I am not of the world; I am the eternal, ever-pure, self-conscious, and ever-free Brahman. In me there is no worldliness and there are no joys and sorrows resulting from worldliness." This state of emancipation is experienced by all the enlightened in this physical existence itself. This being the case, it is not possible to deny the state of jivanmukta (the liberated state

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while still in the body) even as it is impossible to deny the state of bondage "नहि हृष्टेऽनुपपन्नंनाम" says the author of the Bhashya also.

They.—"I have no pleasures or sorrows" are just so many words. Haven't we seen even enlightened people depressed by sorrow, elated with joy, upset by anger? As the enlightened and the unenlightened are equally affected by all kinds of sorrows joys etc., how can it be said that there is a state of Jivanmukti while one is still in the body?

Swamiji.—He who has no feelings of "my" or "mine" with regard to wealth, wife, children or his own body, who has realized the Self and lives in It, can not have pleasures and pains as before. After all, it is the attachment to sensuous objects that causes bondage resulting in pleasure and pain.

They.—It is true the man of peace and detachment does not experience pleasure and pain; but is he not affected by the agreeable and disagreeable elements like the gentle breeze, fire etc.?

Swamiji.—Who can prevent that? So long as one is in the body he can not but be subject to the laws of nature, he can not avoid agreeable or disagreeable sensations altogether. Does not the body exist for them? What is here suggested is not the total destruction of sorrows but their reduction only.

They.—If that is so, so long as an enlightened one is alive, how can that person reach the state of Liberation which is absolutely free from pain and sorrow, and which is full of bliss?

Swamiji.—True, one can not, in the worldly sense. But, from the point of view of reality, a knower of Brahman reaches the state of Liberation free from all sorrow. It is in pursuance of that view of reality that Sarvajna Muni, an advocate of Avidyavada*, places "Sadyomukti" (Immediate Liberation) in the place of Jivanmukti (Liberation in life) "तेनविदुषां सद्योविमुक्तिर्ध्रुवा" In spite of this, if the ancient Acharyas approvingly accepted the idea of "Jeevanmukti", it was because

* Avidyavada is the contention that Brahman is both the locus and the object of nescience.

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they realised the defects that would follow the non-acceptance of it.

After the discussion, one of the participants in the argument, Swami Swayamjyothi used to treat Swamiji with great deference. Along with certain other sadhus he attended Swamiji's discourses on the commentary of the Upanishads by Sri Sankara. Among the young sadhus who were studying the scriptures there, Sri Govindagiri, a Malayali, and Saswathananda, a Bengali, appeared to be very eager to serve Swamiji. They vied with each other in getting bhiksha for Swamiji either from the feeding house or from the homes of devotees. So Swamiji was saved from the necessity to go out in search of bhiksha. Those good people who came seeking the company of the enlightened used to bring bhiksha to Swamiji's asram even without obtaining his previous permission. It was a matter of gratification that two or three other sadhus could be fed every day, at the asram along with Swamiji. Later he had to decline the bhiksha respectfully sent to him from the feeding house as the food brought by devotees was in a surplus. The fact that, so long as he remained at Rishikesh, he was supplied unasked with agreeable food in large quantities, shows the devotion of the residents of the place to sadhus and their strong faith in them.

The winter was over. The time was now come for comfortable travel in the Himalayas. Unattached to the world and attached to the bliss of God realization, Swamiji decided to set out for Uttarkasi.

Meanwhile he received a letter from Sri K. Krishnan Nair, editor of the Manorama. Sri Nair wrote: "The printing of the first part of the book, Kailas yatra, has started. We wish to prefix Swamiji's photo and an account of Swamiji's life to the book. So please send us, as early as possible, a copy of the photo and a brief sketch of your life". After his pilgrimage to Kailas whenever he got time, Swamiji had written brief accounts of his journey, in simple language interspersing moral and spiritual discussions between interesting descriptions and sent them to the editor of the Manorama, to whom he was bound by many ties before he became a sanyasin, for publication in his paper. At the sight of the handwriting, the editor easily

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identified the contributor and published the series of articles with all deference and respect. Even then he had written: "People of Kerala like your articles immensely. They have already expressed their desire to see them in book form. For publication it may be possible to obtain monetary help from various sources. All that we therefore require is your permission for publication in that form". In his reply to the letter Swamiji had granted him the permission. It was some time after this, that Swamiji was requested to send a copy of his photo and a sketch of his life. Swamiji declined to send either. He wrote back: "It does not seem necessary to add a sketch of the author's life or affix his photo. For the benefit of the public it is good to publish the book. What purpose will it serve to add a photo or a biographical sketch?" Swamiji who hated fame and preferred a quiet life unknown to the world, started for Uttarkasi without complying with the last request of the editor. As he very well knew the obstacles on the way via Narendra-nagar, he travelled via Mussori. Upon the travel he relied solely on bhiksha for sustenance. In six or seven days he reached Uttarkasi. There, he found every convenience for his stay at Kailas Mutt which was already known to him. He spent his time joyfully in constant tapas, mental concentration, discussion of the scriptures etc. He also taught some aspirants books on Vedanta, suitable to their individual standards. It was a custom (open only to men of rare merit) with him to spend hours in the evening twilight in deep meditation sitting on some rock or sandbank in the solitudes of the forest at the confluence of the rivers Ribhu and Asi. Besides, many philosophical ideas passed through his mind. Teachers of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, being afraid of sorrow and pain have propagated the view "Worldly life is of the nature of sorrow and pain. So it must be given up. Man can liberate himself only by renunciation". But why should man be afraid of sorrow or pain? If there are sorrowful experiences in worldly life, why not remain in the world and boldly fight them and overcome them? Simply by refusing to engage oneself in worldly activity, one can not get rid of sorrow. What will be the state of this world if, out of the fear of sorrow, the world

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renounces all action? By propagating the idea of renunciation, we are shutting the door to progress and opening the way to deterioration. We have to achieve happiness and peace not by renouncing the world but by remaining fixed in the thought of the Supreme Self, by possessing unshakable faith". This view of certain people is not to be disregarded altogether, felt Swamiji out of his personal experience. To remain as inactive as stock or stone or to indulge in meaningless activities like thoughtless children or lunatics—both these are ill suited to the wise and practical man. So sanyasa cannot be inactivity or meaningless activity. It ought to induce man to engage himself in some ceaseless activity. If that is so, the mistake is not with the object, but with the person, Sanyasa implies realization of Truth and the dissemination of the way to ensure that realization. For intelligent people it means also the study and the teaching of philosophical works. If these principles are strictly followed, nobody can gainsay that it is harmless. On the contrary, it will be for the good of himself and for others. If sanyasins thus perform their duties—activities befitting them and are to be performed by them—activities impossible for others to perform—they will not be subjected to criticism and insult as idlers and do-nothing fellows. Not only that, they will be universally honoured and praised. But sanyasins of the latter type are rare. Most sadhus lead a life of inactivity and become a burden to society. That is why they are subjected to much criticism. Why should man be afraid of pain and sorrow? So long as one is in the body, he can not escape these altogether. Sorrow assails him who is doing penance in the forest as him who remains at home attending to his daily duties. Even the Paramahamsa cannot escape it. To flee before sorrow is merely to waste one's life. It is every one's duty to do his mite to make this sorrowful world a place of joy and happiness. That alone can make the world happier and nobler. One should not, like a coward, flee from sorrow and take refuge in sanyasa. No man should embrace sanyasa either to lead a lazy, effortless life or to pride himself upon being a saint or a guru. The ancient acharyas enjoined sanyasa for far nobler purposes difficult of achievement. Such thought filled Swamiji's mind.

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At this time, a Malayali Sanyasin named Sri Sankarananda Bharathi, formed a friendship with Swamiji. He was staying at Gopalakuti. Being a great devotee of Guruvayurappan he used to perform puja to Lord Krishna everyday. He was also a devotee of Sri Ramana Maharshi. At his request Swamiji composed a hymn to Sri Guruvayurappan consisting of five stanzas and dedicated it to Lord Krishna. For the benefit of the readers the hymn is quoted below:

गोपी गोकुलमालपत्सुमुरली सप्तस्वरैर्हर्षयन् ।
गोपी मण्डलमध्यगः स्मितमुखो माधुर्यवीक्षङ्करः ॥
गोपालश्रिकुरोल्लसच्छिखि शिखण्डा खण्डदीप्तिश्चिरम् ।
गोपालाश्रमविश्रमी विजयतां विश्वैकमुग्धाकृतिः ॥ १ ॥
काशी कुञ्जवती परंचभवतो भूपद्विषो भूरियम् ।
यत्रास्ते खलु शंकरस्तव पदाम्भोजैकभक्तः स्वयम् ॥
त्वत्पादाम्बुज संभवा पुलिनवत्येषा हि सा जाह्नवी ।
वृन्दायामिव राधिकेश रमतामत्रैव गोपीयुतः ॥ २ ॥
शुद्धंबुद्धमबुद्धिगम्यमचलं यद्वस्तु वेदान्तिनाम् ।
तत्वं कृष्ण किशोरविग्रह विभो तत्वं न किंचित्परम् ॥
राधावल्लभ रामराष्ट्र विलसद्धातेशमूर्तिर्भवान् ।
नेहेऽन्यं पुरुषार्थमात्मनि सदा संक्रीडमानोऽस्त्वलम् ॥ ३ ॥
बिभ्राणोऽनरुणं शरीरमरुणे स्थित्वापि तं भासयम् ।
लोकानां गुरुरप्यगौरवनरैः क्रीडंश्च बालकमैः ॥
सच्च त्यच्च हि यस्यरूपमपि च प्रच्छेदि दुश्चेतसाम् ।
श्रीलः श्रीरमणः श्रितामरतरुः कृष्णः स पुष्णातु नः ॥ ४ ॥
भट्टश्रीरथविल्वमङ्गलयतिः प्रख्यातभक्ताग्रगौ ।
दृष्ट्वा यादृशरूपमक्षिजनुषोः साफल्यमासेदतुः ॥
तद्रूपं तव दिव्यदिव्यमनिलाधीश प्रभो कृष्ण मे ।
साक्षादक्षिपथं गमिष्यति कदा चित्तंच वर्द्धिष्यते ॥ ५ ॥

It was winter again. The sky was cloudless and deep blue. A heavenly loveliness was everywhere. It was the best time

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to visit the snow-covered regions of the Himalayas and other divinely beautiful sights. Swamiji decided to wander among some of the highest places of the snow mountain. To the North of Uttarkasi, across a very high peak of the Himalayas lies a famous lake called Dundithal. From Uttarkasi one can reach the lake in one or two days. Swamiji resolved to bathe in the lovely lake on the Full Moon day in Thulam (October-November) and set out for Dundithal in the company of a few other sanyasins. The way was all but impassable. Swamiji rested a couple of days en route at the houses of certain Brahmins with whom he had already made his acquaintance. Really there was no path or track leading to the lake. So, two or three devotees, natives of the region, accompanied the party to guide them and to cut a path across the thick forest for them. When the villagers learnt that the sanyasins were proceeding to Dundithal, most of them, men and women, young and old, were seriously alarmed. They raised a hue and cry saying, "Dundithal is the abode of the gods. If men venture into the sacred region the gods will be furious and will send down hail storms completely destroying the growing paddy in the fields". They tried to stop the party from proceeding on the journey. Alas! If, even in the West advanced in education and civilization, absurd superstitions still persist, why wonder at the superstitions prevailing among the simple mountainfolk of the Himalayan region who have neither education nor culture? At such altitude the land is covered with dense forest. There are no tracks because nobody passes this way. Even at midday it is all dark. Threading their way through the thick forest they moved slowly forward and at last reached the other side. The place looked beautiful with creepers and climbers and forest trees. Wild animals like the tiger and the bear were freely roaming about in the woods. Strange birds, beautiful to look at, rarely seen elsewhere were flying overhead or flitting from tree to tree. Arresting landscapes of inaffable beauty were on every side. All this filled Swamiji's mind with joy. Now and then the party could catch sight of 'Vanarapucheha' and other silvery peaks glittering in the sunshine. Thus proceeding with great courage and patience, enduring various discomforts,

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the party at last arrived at the holy lake situated at the corner of a thick forest, surrounded by lofty mountain walls, secluded from the outside world like a lovely princess in a harem. Only a man of measureless merit and boundless good fortune could ever hope to get a similar chance. Regardless of dangers, Swamiji hurried to the shore of the lake in a mood of triumphant self-gratification and seated himself close to the waters imbibing the elixir of beauty beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. His mind was exalted and his hair rose on end on account of the unique experience. Night came on. The external distraction of the day disappeared. As the moon and the stars rose, the lake seemed drunk with joy. As for Swamiji, his joy knew no bounds, yet his mind was not satiated with the pleasure he experienced in the changing moods of the lovely lake. He passed the night in the sensuous joy that became one with the joy of Self. In the morning he got up from near a fire that had been kindled under a big tree near the margin of the lake, bathed in the clear, pure water and worshipped the goddess of the lake, offering her various kinds of wild flowers. He completed the rites of the 'darshan' by circumambulating the perfectly circular lake. The Asi that flows along the Northern boundary of Uttarkasi, takes its source here as a little stream emerging from the lake. After performing the duties of the morning and breakfast Swamiji started on the return trip with his companions. Their object was to climb down the lofty peak before snowfall and other dangers came on. But man only proposes; it is God who disposes. Before long, dark clouds gathered in the sky with blinding flashes of lightning and reverberating thunder. Soon it began to rain. But what came down was not drops of water but huge hail stones. The atmosphere was already cold; now with the hail storm, the cold became unbearable. There was no roof over their heads to shelter them from the pelting hail. There being no alternative, Swamiji almost despairing of life, slowly made his way over heaps of hail stones, as if he were advancing into the jaws of Death. His companions who were able to walk faster had already crossed the danger zone, before their limbs were benumbed and had descended with the help of walking sticks.

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When Swamiji came half way he found that below the line there had been no hail storm. From there he could proceed rather more quickly because there were no more serious obstacles on the way.

Somehow they escaped from the jaws of Death. Perhaps the kind and just Yamadharma (Lord of Death) let them off, feeling it was wrong to punish these 'sadhus' who were devotees of the Lord. Continuing their journey with peace of mind and joy they reached a house of the Pahadis at the foot of the mountain before nightfall. On arriving there they learnt about a strange development. While India was chastising the presumptuous sadhus with hailstones, the patron deity of the village violently entered into a brahmin of the place. His body all atremble, the brahmin danced, and scattering flowers everywhere, roared and bellowed: "Fear not. I shall set everything right myself". This idea of some god entering into a human medium and giving orders through the medium is prevalent in all parts of India. We come across this strange but common phenomenon in Kerala too. But what is the true nature of deity? Where does he (she) live? How does he (she) enter into man (woman)? Points like these ought to be cleared up through careful investigation and study by savants. Educated and cultured people should take very care not to be hood-winked by imposters or frightened and misled by superstition.

Next day, after breakfast, the party set out from the village reached Uttarkasi without difficulty. Sri Goswami and others who were there congratulated them as brave adventurers who had defied Death himself.

In the same year, with another Sadhu, Swamiji visited Jumnotri—the source of the Jumna. They followed the course up the Jumna passing through several thickly wooded mountain valleys, and reached their destination in four days. On the third day of the travel Swamiji went out for bhiksha to a village. He visited several homes in vain. At last, an old woman came out from the house and prostrated herself before him with humility and devotion, and placing some wheat flour at his feet said: "It is very late. After meal all have gone out on

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some errand or another. So kindly cook this and eat it." Swamiji replied, "Thank you mother. I do not think of cooking to eat; for, I don't know how to cook." "You do not wish to cook; at the same time you wish to eat. Though you are unskilled in cooking, you are skilful at least in eating!" Administering such a loving rebuke, like a mother she engaged herself in cooking, prepared some food and fed him. The sweetness of such loving rebuke and ambrosial food, is as uncommon as unforgettable. In the course of his life as a sadhu he had similar experiences time and again. From the mind filled with joy at the sight of the grandeur and magnificence of the snow mountain all around Jumnotri, all egotism was blotted out. In the mountain cave he saw the deep blue, playful Kalindi (Jamna). He bathed in the warm waters of the Tatakunda, performed the pujas with the divine wild flowers, and meditated upon the Supreme Self, enjoying the bliss of Liberation.

Having returned to Uttarkasi from Jumnotri Swamiji went to Rishikesh as usual to pass the winter. On the way he stayed two or three days at Dehradun as the guest of a wealthy merchant by whose car he reached Rishikesh conveniently in two hours. There he was received by Swami Sri Govindagiri, founder of Ramanasrama, and entertained at a solitary hut of his. Ever since, whenever Swamiji came to Rishikesh he rested at the asram. The place around the hut was overgrown with grass, creepers climbers etc. Flies and mosquitoes too were in plenty. Five or six days after he took up his residence there and embarked upon a severe course of penance, Swamiji was stricken down with malaria. The sadhus in the neighbourhood nursed him carefully. The nursing and nature treatments like fasting restored him to health in ten or twelve days. God helps the otherwise helpless Sadhus to preserve their bodies. Who else is there to look after them—mother, father, wife, son, relation or servants? Once or twice at Rishikesh Swamiji had malarial attacks again during the same season. Since then Swamiji made it a custom to return to Rishikesh for wintering only after the malarial season. Once, while he was having an attack of malaria judge of Lakshmanpur, named Ganga Sankar,

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having heard of Swamiji, came to see him. After prostrating himself before Swamiji, he took his seat near him. Exchange of greetings over, they talked on spiritual subjects for some time. Ganga Sanker was a man of intellect rather than a man of faith. The power of blind faith to tame men whose minds have been developed by modern education and who have become capable of independent thinking, and win them over to its side is after all limited. However, after this first meeting, whenever Ganga Sanker came to Rishikesh he met Swamiji and discussed subjects like Bhakti, Jnana and spiritual exercises with him. These annual meetings strengthened the ties of friendship between them. More about him later on.

When, by the grace of God, Swamiji had regained his health in full, he began to teach attentive and faithful Sadhus books on Vedanta every morning. In the afternoon he met good people who were spiritually inclined and discussed the holy scriptures with them. These discussions generally took the form of question and answers. So long as Swamiji continued to spend his winter at Rishikesh, these meetings grew from more to more. He engaged himself in these activities for more than one reason. For one thing, he hoped that these meetings and discussions would prove useful, though not to all, at least to qualified persons with the spirit of dispassion and the eagerness to attain Liberation; for another, he felt that it was the duty of sadhus, so long as they were in their bodies to serve the world according to their might.

At about this time Swamiji received a letter from the editor of the Manorama. A few months earlier, at Kailas Mutt, Uttarkasi, he had received a letter from him along with two or three copies of Kailas Yatra Part I. In the letters the editor had written, " All the papers and magazines of Kerala have very highly praised this new publication. The opinions published by them will be collected and appended to the second part of the book. Please contribute such series of articles in future also for the benefit of the people of Kerala. Pray don't forget the people of Kerala, don't forget the Manorama. If, in the future, you are pleased to write any book, kindly send it to me for publication. Please also accept as your own the

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issues of the Manorama which will be sent to you regularly by post." When Swamiji thus learnt that his book had gained the appreciation of all the people of Kerala and that it had been prescribed as a non-detailed text in schools, he felt sincerely gratified that his efforts to serve his mother tongue had not been in vain. Partly out of natural inclination and partly on account of the pressure exerted on him by the editor of the Manorama, he began to write, in his elegant and simple style, accounts of his visits to the important temples in the Himalayas introducing by the way discussions on the principles of Vedanta so that these might add to the knowledge of his compatriots and enrich his mother tongue. The articles describing the glory of the Himalayas, by their originality and freshness, delighted all the readers. Later these articles were collected and published in book form under the title,* "Himagiri Viharam". First it was published in two volumes. To the first Part the publisher had added a brief account of Swamiji's life before he accepted Sanyasa. In the first Part of Kailas Yatra, owing to the protest of Swamiji, only a very brief and incomplete sketch of his life had been given. Subsequently this defect was remedied by the addition of a clearer and more detailed account of the life to Himagiri Viharam. Swamiji was pleased to learn that the book had met with the appreciation of not only papers and magazines and scholars but also of the common people. He felt that, even though he was living so far away from his native district, he had been able to render some service, however slight, to his mother tongue.

In addition to all this, out of his love for the mother tongue he wrote an independent and detailed commentary in Malayalam on "Bhakti Darshan" by Muni Sri Sandilya. Among other things he prepared also, in the course of two years, a Malayalam translation of the Bhashyams (commentary) on Isa, Kena, and Katha upanishads by Sri Sankara. The first of these was sent to the editor of the Manorama and the others to another friend at their request. But, unfortunately they have not seen

* This book has been subsequently translated into English by Sri T. N. K. Pillai and published by the Chinmaya Mission, and into Hindi by Sri Sudhamsu Chaturvedi and published by Swami Mahadeva Vanom.

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the light of day so far. All this is mentioned here just to show Swamiji's love of his mother tongue and his eagerness to add to its wealth, however slight his contribution might be; especially in view of the fact that he has renounced everything and has gone from Kanyakumari to the Himalayas to reside there permanently cutt off from his native place and his people. This is just to suggest that everyone, in whatever position he be, and wherever he be, must do all in his power to serve the cause of his mother tongue.

At the end of the cold season Swamiji wished to visit those Himalayan regions he had hitherto left unvisited. After all, a Sanyasin's life is unattached and free. To people attachment brings bondage, detachment liberation. "आसंगाद्बध्यते जन्तुरसंगाच्च विमुच्यते" So by realizing man's true nature he should break off inner attachment; by the practice of non-possession he must break off external attachment as well. A Knower of Truth who indulges in activities will be detached in spirit but externally he gets bound; he loses his freedom. So long as one retains one's body one can not sever all external attachments. A man can renounce everything else, but he cannot renounce his body. Yet, by the observance of non-possession he can escape from most of the ties. In the measure of his renunciation, and freedom he approaches his ideal as a Knower of Truth. Some hold that one should engage one self in activities for the good of the world even if thereby he is to suffer distractions and bondage. Others say that one should enter into the unbroken state of Samadhi (where mind is fully merged in the Self) leaving aside all external activities. According to the qualifications of the aspirant, both these views are sound and are not contradictory. The Knower of Brahman who has broken off all ties has no fear of bondage whatever be his activities. He remains as unattached as the lotus-leaf in water. As the Self alone is the cause of joy, he remains happy in the Self, free from love, hate, fear and all kinds of excitements. The steadfast man in whose eyes pleasure and pain, friend and enemy, honour and dishonour, are all the same is a knower of Brahman. He who has conquered the senses and made them

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his slaves and become their master is the Knower of Brahman. One who lives in the present without joy or sorrow, without thinking of the past or the future, is regarded by the learned as a knower of Brahman. He is a knower of Truth who remains passive as a mere witness leaving the senses to their activities. He alone sees truly who sees the eternal, unattached, pure, wise and free Self in every creature and everything. This direct vision is the vision of God. He who sees God becomes God. He is the Knower of Self.

आत्मनोऽन्यन्नसन्तुष्टि, हेतुस्तत्रैव तुष्टिमान् ।
रागद्वेष भयोद्वेगैर्विमुक्तो, यः स आत्मवित् ॥ (१)
सुख दुःखे सुहृद्द्वेष्यौ मानामानौ च यस्य वै ।
समतां प्रापतुर्धीरस्तदोच्येत स आत्मधीः ॥ (२)
इन्द्रियाणां च कैङ्कर्यम्, कृतं प्रागथ तज्जयात् ।
साक्षात् स्वामित्वमापेदे, जितात्मा यः स आत्मवित् ॥ (३)
उपेक्षते गतं यद्यद्, प्राप्तं प्राप्तमपेक्षते ।
हर्षशोकविहीनो यः, स प्रोक्तो ब्रह्मविद्बुधैः ॥ (४)
तत्तच्चेष्ठासु चाक्षाणाम्, नाहंकर्तेति सज्जते ।
यः स्वनिष्त्रियतानिष्टो, नैष विद्वान् विकम्पते ॥ (५)
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानमेकं नित्यं निरञ्जनम् ।
शुद्धं बुद्धं च मुक्तंच यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥ (६)
प्रतीचो दर्शनं यत्तत् साक्षादीश्वरदर्शनम् ।
ईशदर्शी चेशरूपस्तस्मादीश्वर आत्मवित् ॥ (७)

Who that has become one with the Supreme Self by direct perception and is absolutely desireless, will relinquish the world and a life of activity for fear of attachment? Whether he lives in meditation or engages himself in action, it is all the same. Since he sees everything homogeneous, he cannot fall from the state of Supreme Peace.

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CHAPTER 7

Swamiji desired to visit some famous 'theerthas' situated at inaccessible heights in the distant Himalayas. In accordance with that desire, on the Rama Navami day, he set out for Kurukshetra by train. A Malayali brahmacharin donning ochre-coloured robes accompanied him. He had come to Rishikesh in his eager desire to become a 'sanyasin'. On his arrival there he had sought Swamiji's acquaintance and had been staying with him. Swamiji did not like to leave the Himalayas but considering the conveniences of the journey he had decided to travel by train for some distance. As he had never before visited the Historic Kurukshetra he alighted there. Without letting anybody know who he was, he spent three or four days comfortably on the Verandah of a vacant building near the Kalee Kambliwallah Temple. He performed all the rites that common pilgrims perform. With the other devotees he bathed in the holy 'theertha' in which red lotuses were in full bloom, and worshipped at the temples of Lord Krishna and the Pandavas. He visited the place where the mighty Bheeshma lay on a bed of arrows and meditated upon his noble counsels. There was also another lake, extensive and beautiful, on the way. Satisfied with the sight of all that was worth seeing he turned his steps back to the Himalayas. As there was not in the place much to attract or gladden his heart, Swamiji did not wish to pass a longer time there. Leaving the brahmacharin behind he travelled by himself, by train to Hoshiarpur to the North of the Punjab. Accepting the hospitality of a Brahmin merchant with whom he had got acquainted by chance and of a judge of the two named Ayodhya Prasad, he spent four happy days at the place. At the request of the judge it was from his house that Swamiji was getting his meal. After food the guest and the host spent much time discussing spiritual subjects. Judge Ayodhya Prasad was sincerely devoted to sanyasins as well as to God. In future years, whenever he came to Rishikesh during the cold season he used to meet Swamiji and participate in the gatherings at his residence.

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To resume his journey Swamiji got into a bus at Hoshiarpur but soon gave up the bus journey on account of the roughness of the road and proceeded on foot. The mountain district was full of variety. There were areas well-watered and places where there was great scarcity of water. Some of the scenery were very beautiful, others were ugly and strange. All the same, the region is celebrated in the Puranas. On the fifth day he arrived at the famous temple Jwalamukhi. On the way he had visited a well-known Devi temple called Chintapurni. Sri Ayodhya Prasad had informed a local government officer in advance about Swamiji's proposed visit and the officer was waiting for him. Swamiji stayed with him as his guest and went round the place to see what was worth seeing. In her beautiful golden temple he worshipped the auspicious goddess Jwalamukhi.

The interior of the temple is built of beautiful smooth marble. It is the leaping flames constantly appearing and disappearing within the recesses of the temple that are worshipped here as the manifestations of Goddess Parvathi. Modern scientists explain away this phenomenon as the flames rising from rocks of Sulphur, but to the common man it appears as a marvel. The ancient Rishis made use of such uncommon Natural phenomena as a means to withdraw the mind of the worldlings from external things and to project it Godwards. At the sight of such rare and wonderful sights even atheistical fools come to exclaim "Lo! see the glorious Divine Sport!" and think of Godhead. That is why all over India, places strikingly peculiar or arrestingly beautiful have been celebrated as 'theerthas' and the abodes of the gods. Evidently the motives of the ancients in propagating such ideas was to see all people blessed. The priests of Jwalamukhi proudly told Swamiji that even the Mughal emperors had acknowledged the powers and glory of the Goddess and presented many valuable gifts to the temple. Swamiji saw also Sanyasins living on the sides of the mountain. But what attracted him more was not these Sadhus but the solitary and beautiful asrams and groves of trees. At Jwalamukhi, Swamiji again came across a young, good natured Sadhu who had taken his M.A. Degree and whom Swamiji

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had previously met at Rishikesh. After spending some days in the sacred place, he proceeded to the plains all alone. From there he went to Kangda by train. The journey took one day and he stayed at a temple in Kangda for a few days. Then he set out again by train for Vaidyanatham. At the famous temple he met a Brahmin named Somadatta and made his acquaintance. Somadatta was a good scholar, modest by nature and a student of Vedanta by inclination. After the exchange of greetings they discussed the scriptures freely in Sanskrit for some time. Yielding to the pressure of Samadatta and of a Dandiswami who was Somadatta's friend and a very popular person, Swamiji spent two days at the Dandiswami's Mutt. He got into the train again. At the second station, as misfortune would have it, a woman of easy morals entered the compartment. Following her, like donkeys following a she-donkey, three or four of her young lovers too entered and took their seat near her. Shameless and unrestrained, they indulged in obscene language and flirtation. Now and then our poor Swamiji, with his clean-shaven head sitting quietly in a corner became the target of their verbal, obscene attacks. But he remained unmoved by all this, concentrating his mind upon the Supreme Self. What was the use of giving good counsel to those lustful youngsters incapable of discrimination? A sadhu must be as patient as the earth. Insult from others is the touch stone of his patience; censure elevates; praise degrades. A man of dispassion and discrimination, therefore, never hankers after praise or appreciation; on the contrary, he loves deprecation.

A few days earlier, he had a similar experience at a railway station. He was waiting for the train. A burly Sikh porter, abruptly began to shower abuses on him. "Putting on ochre-coloured robes these do-nothing fellows wander up and down the country. They are a burden to the industrious. The number of fellows like you is now multiplying very fast. Why don't you Sanyasins settle down somewhere and do some honest work to fill your belly?" With a smile on his face, and betraying no sign of excitement, Swamiji gently replied; "When we find that it is not possible to fill our belly even by wearing ochre-coloured robes and wandering up and down the country

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we shall settle down somewhere like you and fill our bellies by engaging ourselves in some worldly activity or other".

Thoughts differ as minds differ. It is unnatural as well as impossible to have uniformity in mind and thought. Such dead uniformity can not even be thought of. Then, what is there to wonder at, if some people cry down what others extol? In some peoples' eyes Sivalinga and Salagrama are Siva and Vishnu. In the eyes of others they are merely stone. Similarly in the eyes of some people pious Sanyasins who lead exalted lives, appear as most honourable. Others regard them as idle parasites, useless and despicable, verily a burden to the Earth. If people entertain such different views, why quarrel with them?

Fortunately Swamiji reached his destination in half an hour's time, and escaped from that unpleasant situation. From Yogindranagar he proceeded slowly northwards on foot. One by one he crossed the mountains and passed through several villages reaching the capital of the state of Mandi in two or three days. The town stands on the bank of the River Vipasa. He stayed there for five or six days in a temple attached to a guest house. A Sadhu from the lowlands named Kailasgiri who was then staying there felt genuine veneration for Swamiji and began to minister to him with utmost devotion. After nearly a week's rest Swamiji set out with Kailasagiri in the direction of a theertha called "Neelahradam".

महाश्चर्यकरं लोके जले पर्वतसंभ्रमः ।
किमिदं देवचरितं किंवा दानवसंभवम् ॥

The lake so described in the Puranas is now known as L. Reewal. It is a 'theertha' revered equally by the Hindus and the Buddhists. The lovely lake is walled in by mountains on all sides. Swamiji and Kailasagiri reached it in a day. In that holy lake adorned with red lotuses they washed themselves and conducted puja, and other rites with a heart full of joy and satisfaction. Two or three huge lumps of earth with bowers and small trees upon them looking like islands of varying sizes, were floating on the water, moving hither and thither according to the direction of the wind. This is a peculiarity of the theertha. The legend

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connected with the lake says that Lord Sri Parameswara gave ' darshan ' to the Rishi Lomasa who was for long doing ' tapas ' near the lake, in the form of a mountain peak. During the three days Swamiji passed there, he read through all the literature dealing with the traditional history of the place presented to him by the priests. There was a Buddhist Vihara nearby. Swamiji had his ' darshan ' there too, again and again. With the head priest he once circumambulated the lake. Then they returned to Mandi where they rested for a few days. With Kailasagiri Swamiji next proceeded to another ' theertha ' called Manikarnika. Resting here and there on the way they reached their theertha in six or seven days. A bitter experience on the way during this journey has to be recorded here as it is unforgettable. The incident reveals what wicked, roguish and mean fellows put on the ochre-coloured robes and pass for holy Sanyasins. Swamiji was resting at the asram of a sadhu, built under a holy fig tree on the bank of the Vipasa. There at night between 9 O' clock and 10, a Punjabi brahmin was holding discourses on Thulasidasa Ramayana. Poetic and musical these discourses attracted large crowds to the asram. On the third day after the gathering had dispersed, the Sadhus and devotees lay down to sleep on a raised dais screened off on three sides; The Punjabi lay down near Swamiji keeping his invaluable book close to his pillow and slept soundly. Printed in large characters, with an extensive commentary, the book was all in all to him. Everybody slept well. At about 3 a.m. hearing some sound Swamiji suddenly woke up. In a state of agitation he looked round and caught sight of a fellow jumping down from the dais and running away. It was his hurried footsteps that had started Swamiji out of his slumber. In the moonlight he saw clearly the dark, stout figure with matted hair tied up into a bundle on the top of his head his entire body smeared with ashes and wearing only a narrow strip of cloth to cover the privy parts, receding fast into the distance carrying a bundle of cloth containing the precious book of the Punjab. The day had scarcely broken when the owner of the book woke up and found his dear, dear book gone. It was what supported his life. Copies of that magnificent and useful edition was not

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available in that part of the country. On realizing the terrible loss the poor man broke out into a cry. His grief was heart rending. A brahmin from Benares well versed in grammar and other branches of learning had settled down in that place marrying a Pahadi woman. A rumour had circulated to the effect that brahmin who was earning his living by the exhibitions of his learning had become jealous of the Punjabi scholar and had a grudge against him. So, suspicion was turned upon him. But the Benares brahmin was among those who came to express their sorrow upon the Punjabi's loss. On that occasion he talked with Swamiji also for a length of time. At ten O'clock, after his meal, Swamiji set out for Manikarnika according to his original programme. His heart was, however, filled with surprise and sorrow at his misconduct of a black-sheep among sanyasins. Where is the Supreme honour and dignity of the Sanyasins? Where is such meanness and wickedness? Where is that holy appearance with that matted hair, that besmeared body, that naked figure with its strip of cloth? Where is the reality with all its hellish wickedness and despicable meaness? Such fellows are the scum of society emitting a bad odour wherever they go. It is these mean impostors who dethrone Sanyasa from its time-honoured, exalted place. Yet, why find fault with these uneducated, shiftless, poor fellows who deserve more of our pity than of our contempt? What is the use of reproaching them? All that can be said in this context is,such evils of social life should be rooted out completely.

Swamiji spent two days at Manikarnika on the bank of the Parvathi Ganga. After bathing in the hot water pool (Ushna Kunda) he performed the 'pujas' and then freed himself from the desire to visit that sacred place. On the way he had experienced no difficulty in obtaining 'bhiksha' or other conveniences. Sometimes the 'sadhu' who accompanied Swamiji went out and got food for Swamiji as well. Some times even that was not necessary; food was brought to them by devotees, once a day. Swamiji had no skill in seeking bhiksha; still, before his companion joined him, he had got enough in the Madhukari way. From Manikarnika he went to the capital of the state Kulu. Kulu is a small town. But

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it is inhabited by good people full of faith. Vegetables are available in plenty and there are beautiful sights to see. Swamiji stayed for a few days in the town in great comfort. There were many people fond of listening to spiritual discourses. Leaving Kulu Swamiji went to Vasishtam. He reached there in two or three days. Here also were hot water pools where he washed himself and devoutly conducted worship at the Vasishta temple with the offering of flowers, etc. He paid his respects to Vasishta, the great teacher and householder, who shines among the holy Rishis like the Moon among the stars, and then meditated upon his teachings regarding the abidance on the Self. With his mind thus fixed on the Supreme Self he passed four happy days at Vasishta. Then, with some saintly men, he resolved to cross a very high mountain pass, ice-covered, beautiful and terrible. It was an ocean of solid ice all around and the mountain peak was shining like burnished silver. With great courage Swamiji began to climb, step by step.

The famous mountain-pass Ratang inspired Swamiji with terror as well as pleasure. He joined a group of Tibetan merchants whom he met by sheer chance and in their company crossed the Pass with great difficulty. His eyes feasted upon the unprecedented and unearthly sight he saw from the top of that very high Pass which could not satiate him. How beautiful is creation! What is man's work by its side? If it has any beauty it is, after all, a faint reflection of the beauty of God's creation. God is Truth; Beauty is Truth. They who know the truth about 'Prakrithi' and 'Purusha', experience the Divine presence in places of such beauty and grandeur. When the rays of the sun fell on the icy landscape bathing it in celestial glory, Swamiji forgot everything else, forgot even himself and sported about like a child. Below the pass are extremely cold plains surrounded by high mountains on all sides. Here there are villages peopled by Buddhists. The villagers are remarkable for their faith and respect for Sadhus. So there was no dearth of milk, curds, butter, vegetables, etc. On the journey from Vasishtom Swamiji had found himself at the head of a party of six or seven Sanyasins. When his

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followers had cooked their meal they first offered part of it to Swamiji and so he had no pains to take, on that score. At the end of nine days of such happy travel he arrived at the temple of Thrilokeenath, venerated equally by Hindus as well as non-Hindus. The charming temple stands on the right bank of the Chandrabhaga, a tributary of the Sindhu. He found there only a few Sanyasins, both Hindu and Buddhist, who had come from far off places. As the priest who bears the title 'Lama' was out of station it was his wife who acted in his place and helped Swamiji to perform puja, etc. At Thrilokeenath, as in Tibet, the Buddhists conduct their worship with their leather sandals on. Swamiji offered flowers, fruits, etc. to both Lord Vishnu and to the Prince among Sanyasins, Sri Buddha, with wonder and devotion. After prostration and circumambulation, he rested in a quiet corner of the temple for the night. He pondered deeply over the doctrines of Buddhism. With the beautiful coloured robes hung up by the monks both over and outside the temple, it looked like a lovely creeper with vernal blossoms at the tips of its branches.

"In olden times this was the land of ogres and ogresses. Our ancestors killed them all and made this land safe for human beings." The chieftain of the place modestly told Swamiji. He was lying ill. It was at his request that Swamiji went to see him. The lord and his courtiers received Swamiji with great reverence and entertained him. They were engaged in conversation for a long time. In the course of the talk the lord gave him a brief history of the place. The story of the giants brought into Swamiji's memory the tales of the Rakshasas, Yakshas, Kinnaras, etc., found in the Puranas and the Epics. After three days' stay at the court, Swamiji decided to return with Kailasagiri. Some of the sanyasins who accompanied him left for Srimanmahesh, another temple on the peak of the Himalayas. The account of the hardships in crossing a very long, ice-covered Pass named Kupti, discouraged Swamiji from going to Srimanmahesh. Three miles away there was a famous Buddhist monastery called Kelang. Eager to see it Swamiji set out in that direction. There was heavy rain and snowfall on the way. This occurred day after day. Owing

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to the frequent snowfall the temperature went down. Swamiji endured the hardships caused by bitter cold with exemplary patience. His body shrank and grew dark as if exposed to fire. He crossed the Vasishta Pass and returned to kulu. From that town he set out in the direction of Uttarkasi. Walking continually for five or six days he reached a small but beautiful town like Ramapuram on the Satadru. As Kailasagiri desired to visit certain other theert has he had left Swamiji who proceeded all alone through forests haunted by fierce wild animals and over plateaus and by villages in a fearless and cheerful mood. He sustained himself on bhiksha which he himself managed to get. For persons who are firmly convinced that everything is God and who find joy in Him, what is there to fear, where is fear to be found?

Swamiji spent three or four days in that small town, eighty miles to the North West of Simla. After visiting the Buddhist temples, etc., he set out all alone for Uttarkasi. He carried no provisions with him for the journey except the merits and demerits of his own actions. For sanyasins, seeking bhiksha in village is a blessing because it gives them opportunities to build up virtues like bodily and mental restraint, patience, modesty, etc. In villages, some adore sanyasins with great devotion; some treat them with contempt; some angrily shower abuses upon them. Even if they are supplied with food in plenty some will not give a morsel to the sanyasin; on the contrary, even at untimely hours some prepare food for him in haste and feed him with devotion. Such sweet and bitter experiences Swamiji had on this journey as well. One evening, at sunset, Swamiji arrived at a village near a solitary wild forest. It was raining heavily. Darkness was coming on. With the hope of passing the night in the village Swamiji stepped into it. All on a sudden, some dirty and fierce looking villagers pounced upon him, like wild animals and stopped him with reproachful words. As there was no alternative, Swamiji seated himself under a tree outside the village in darkness in the pelting rain, intending to pass the night somehow. Two hours passed. It was about 9 O'clock. A kind old man suddenly appeared before him and said,

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" Swamiji, it is not right to remain here thus at this untimely hour in darkness. Please come with me to my house and pass the night there". Accordingly Swamiji spent that night somehow in that small hut of the kind man. He did not accept the bread made of the flour of wild grains that was so kindly offered to him for food. In the morning he left the place. Quite contrary was his experience elsewhere on another day. A Moslim who was sitting in his house on the way side, seeing Swamiji, greeted him reverentially with the phrase " Jaya Narayana", prostrated himself before him, and generously and modestly said to a Kshatriya servant of his " It is time for meal. Please prepare food for Swamiji in some clean place and give it to him" such varied experiences hold lessons for the thoughtful Sadhu.

In time he came in sight of the blue stream of Kalindi. He washed himself in the stream with joy and devotion and drank as much of the water as he wished. Then crossing a high mountain range to the west of the Jumna basin he came upon the lovely Ganga so dear to his heart. Along the bank of the Ganga he continued his journey towards Uttarkasi. Only hill tribes know the lonely and difficult route which lies across several hills but Swamiji followed it by himself reaching Uttarkasi in twentyfive days after leaving Kulu. There were still some days to Vyasa Purnima. For one who sees God everywhere and in everything, what is there to gain by such pilgrimages? Or rather, what has he to gain? Actions good or evil cannot touch him. Everything is a part of the Divine sport.

At Uttarkasi he met his old saintly friends and felt very happy. Once again he took up his abode in a hut belonging to Kailas Mutt and began to pass his days as before, in ' tapas ' and the teaching of Vedanta. As he was a devotee of Siva from childhood, by the force of his natural inclinations, he wished to worship Sri Kasi Viswanath in a new way. Accordingly, everyday from Guru Purnima he composed a few stanzas in praise of Sri Kasi Viswanath and read them after his morning bath in the Ganga at the temple before Lord Viswanatha. By the grace of God this went on unobstructed. This

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composition in praise of Siva continued for two months during the Chathurmasya as part of his tapas afforded him great delight and satisfaction. The immediate visible effect was that his mind became pure, clear, and concentrated. He believed that Sri Viswanath blessed him for this unparalldlled feat of worship. The hymn contained the gist of sixteen Upanishads. The stanzas beginning with

विश्वनाथ नमस्तुभ्यं विश्वमायाविलासिने ।
काशिकेश नमस्तुभ्यं केशवाद्यर्चितांघ्रये ।।

were collected into bunches and published in book form under the name "Sree Soumyakaseesa Stotram" Sri Ganesadatta Goswami who was performing 'tapas' there happened to hear about the hymn from Swamiji and others and got a manuscript copy of it with the object of publishing it for the benefit of mankind.

On the arrival of Autumn, according to his usual custom. Swamiji started for Rishikesh without any companion. He continued his journey slowly along the bank of the Ganga resting here and there in places beautified with trees and bowers. At such places Swamiji who was steeped in meditation used to lose all sense of time and place, hunger and thirst. Not only on this route, but on most routes in the Himalayas he had similar experiences. What was he thinking about on such occasions? Of course, on the Supreme Self and nothing else. He was always experiencing the Divine joy, eternal, unsurpassed and supreme. Alas! Seekers of wordly enjoyment implore God for sensuous pleasures; people in pain pray Him to rid them of their pains; travellers crossing the sea or mountain ask Him for a safe passage; thieves and cheats to obeisance to God to save them from punishment; sinners praise God to escape from the effects of their sin; fighters pray to win their battles. Thus, enchanters, physicians and astrologers, enslaved by their desires, worship God as the instrument for the fulfilment of their desires. How can they then understand the Supreme Truth or enjoy the Supreme Bliss? Even their faith in God and His glory depends upon the fulfilment of their desires as

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their faith in the saintly Sadhus of the world. Only those can enjoy the Supreme Divine bliss who have no desires, whose conscience is clear, who believe in the existence of God as in their own and find their self as one with the Supreme Self. Their mind always flows naturally towards God, without any conscious effort, as water flows downwards. Even at the moment of mental distraction their peace is not broken. They are naturally drawn to that unsurpassed peace that follows the cessation of distractions. Swamiji who desired to enjoy such Divine peace was by natural inclination attracted to places of celestial beauty. Resting at will at the lovely places on the way, he travelled slowly towards Rishikesh where he had decided to spend his winter.

As he was engaged in unbroken tapasya two months slipped away like two minutes. The Kumbhamela at Prayag was approaching. The hearts of Sanyasins and of people eager for association with the enlightened began to dance for joy. Swamiji was by nature averse to attending such gala functions. So he entertained no thought of going to the 'mela'. But Sri Ganga Sankar who was sincerely devoted to Swamiji was eager to participate in the festival. Yielding to his persuasion, Swamiji too set out for Prayag in the company of his friends Swami Sivananda and Swami Advaitananda. At Prayag Swamiji stayed for five or six days at a house near the Bharadwaj Temple. As at Hardwar in Prayag also several hundreds of thousands of people had gathered at the holy confluence of the rivers. In modern times such 'melas' have lost sight of their original purpose. They no longer aim at 'tapas' or religious propaganda. Now they are a kind of entertainment and display. Most people who assemble on such occasions are lovers of revelry. Now and then Swamiji roamed about the banks listening to the singing of hymns by devotees and discussions by learned men. One day he went with his friends to visit the Sanyasins living on either bank of the Ganga. Here and there he came across some corpulent and loquacious fellows, who were said to be men of dispassion. It was the sight of their figure that gave Swamiji more joy than their words. On the way back he saw also a Mandaleswar who was camping in

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an extensive and beautiful tent pitched on the sand bank of the Ganga. Swamiji went to him, prostrated himself before him and took a seat near him. After greetings they happened to discuss the scriptures for a while "How to indentify a Jeevan-mukta; what are his signs" was the subject of their discussion: The Mandaleswar who was modest by nature, said: "I am not particularly skilled in the discussion of scriptures. Here is a profound scholar who can hold discussions with you." With these words he pointed to a scholar advanced in age, seated near him. Lo! The Mandaleswar's words were scarcely out of his mouth when that arrogant scholar began to speak in a tone swelling with pride: "Breaking of the "Knot" at heart is, of course, the unmistakable sign. Haven't you heard about the signs of Sthitha prajna given by the Lord "प्रजहातियदाकामान्" etc.

Swamiji.—Of course, I know that. But Lord Krishna gives freedom from all desires etc., as signs of knower of Truth only as the statement of a current fact, not as the assertion of an inevitable truth. He repudiates strong desires, it is true, but he doesn't say that a knower of Truth won't have even light desires and the various actions springing out of them. Then there is the question, how to decide whether an action is the outcome of a strong desire or a light one.

Pundit.—That, of course, is easy for a man who has the necessary skill.

Swamiji.—How is that? by guess work? Don't we often come across sinful hypocrites, bent upon cheating others, successfully posing, at least for a time, as innocent children, or as conquerors of all desires or at the most as having only light ones? What is the test that hill help us to distinguish such fellows from really good people?

As soon as he heard these words the pedant flew into a passion supposing that Swamiji had come to defeat him in argument. His eyes grew red, his face got distorted and he looked like an angry cobra with its hood spread out. In a fury he roared: "Have you come to contradict us skilled in all the arts and sciences? Hah! Hah! Wonder of wonders! Now we will

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show you the depth of our learning". In spite of this violent outburst Swamiji remained cool and collected. With his natural modesty he said: "You are a great and saintly scholar. Why get angry? Ignorant people like me go to Acharyas like you to learn what little we can. Please don't misunderstand me. There is no doubt we can measure other people's knowledge or ignorance by logical reasoning and inference. But how can that be done through fallacious reasoning? For judging other people's abidance in Truth we can not rely on direct perception or inference. The great rishis and acharyas have repeatedly asserted this:

न परस्य कस्यचिद्वेदनं परसंवेदनम् ।
किन्तु स्वसंवेद्यमेव, क्षौद्रादीनामास्वादनसौख्यवत् ।।

(It is not possible for any man to know about another's realization of the Supreme Self. Only the man who drinks honey knows its sweetness—so also the experience of Brahman).

The pedant was in a rage. In a loud and disgusting tone he roared: "Hah! you contradict what I say! If you are such a very learned man answer me. You are blurting out "Vedanam" "Vedanam". Tell me, what is its form?

The Pedant's gratuitous anger and his fierceness struck Swamiji and his companion with wonder. They felt only pity for him. "To sit near you is as unbearable as sitting close to the blazing fire". With these words they modestly bade good bye to him who looked another Durvasas, and got up from their seats. At this, the Pedant felt ashamed and became calm. Folding his hands he said, "Clouds thunder, send down rain and then become calm. In the arena wrestlers fight tooth and nail, fell the antagonists on the ground, sit on their breasts and shout in triumph. Then they get up, embrace one another and return home as friends. Thus a storm is followed always by a calm. Then why get disturbed and frightened over a scriptural discussion?" Swamiji said not a word in

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reply. " It is not good for a Mahatma to assume the appearance of the Devil " with such thoughts he withdrew himself from that presence.

At Swamiji's residence there were gatherings of good and pious people. Several persons who were highly educated in English came to pay their respects to the " Saint of Rishikesh ". Among them was a Barrister-at-law, intelligent, thoughtful and inclined to a spiritual life. One day he discussed the significance and inner meaning of Bhagavad Gita with Swamiji: " Man should never give up his duties. While attending to his duties he can carry on his meditation on the Supreme Truth, realize Brahman, and abide in Him. To realize God it is not necessary to reject a life of action and accept sanyasa. Rejection of a life of action is a sign of cowardice, not of courage. Action, acquisition of Supreme Knowledge and abidance in that Knowledge—these are never contradictory. That is the meaning of the Geetha ". So argued he with the skill and eloquence of a lawyer, citing innumerable quotations from the book: " If action is natural to the ignorant, inaction is equally natural to the enlightened. Drunk with the Divine bliss the enlightened, like children, lunatics and drunkards are no longer bound by action. They become real Sanyasins. Such natural abstention from action resulting from true Knowledge is not tabooed by the Geetha or similar books. Even the Geetha that enjoins action in such words as these " नियतं कुरु कर्म, त्वं कर्मज्यायोह्यकर्मण:", ", does not altogether repudiate a life of inaction ". So argued Swamiji on the other side. The discussion so started was not concluded then. It was continued by letters after Swamiji reached Rishikesh. The philosophical lawyer informed Swamiji that he was writing a commentary on the Geetha in English. He also read out modestly his rather uncommon interpretation of each stanza to Swamiji. He had explained the stanzas defining the different types of food, (Satwika, Rajsa and Tamasa) in an ingenious and independant way: " The common and accepted interpretation is this. The food that helps to develop Satvik qualities in the eater is Satvik; what produces Rajasik. Tamsik qualities as Rajasik or Tamasik.

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If this is the true interpretation it will not be possible to assign a definite character or form to it because, it is found that the character of Satwa Rajasa etc., changes according to time and place. In summer, sweetmeats prepared in ghee appear heavy and Tamasik in Madras but in the Himalayan region, in winter, they appear as light and Satvik. In the same way milk and fruits too appear heavy and tamasik according to their quantity. So it follows that in the case of food and drink the character as Satvik etc., is indefinite. So the stanzas have to be reinterpreted so as not to offend logic or experience". So on and so forth. Later on, after going through the Geetha with his English commentary Swamiji commended his skill in thinking and his ardent desire to accumulate spiritual knowledge. Thus there were opportunities not only to find spiritual satisfaction by participating in the discussion of scriptures and the association with good and enlightened people, but also to satisfy his stomach with feasts comprising a great variety of sweetmeats like rasagola, sandesh, modak etc. As at the time Swamiji took no salt, he did not eat anything that was salted. Drinks like tea too were avoided. To conquer his palate, he used to observe at Rishikesh such vows every now and then. But on travels at the Asramas belonging to other sanyasins and while taking food with them he did not scrupulously adhere to such practices. While he was still a brahmacharin he had once followed this vow for some time at home. At very high altitudes like Uttarkasi and Gangotri, when cold became unbearable, he had found salt, tea etc., as indispensable and had therefore been compelled not to enforce such self-imposed rules very strictly.

Under the sign of the capricornus on the day of the Kumbhasnana (ceremonial bath of the Kumbha mela) he bathed early in the morning in the holy blue-white water of the Thriveni (the confluence of the three rivers Ganga, Jumna and Saraswati) with a mind full of faith like an innocent child. In the jostling crowd it was no easy thing to do but he managed even though with difficulty. On the sand bank where several hundreds of thousands of men and women were pushing one another for a place there appeared a grand procession of the Naga Sadhus

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with all their paraphernalia making their way to the confluence. Women too were with them. "Alas! How did this most contemptible procession of men shark-naked begin? How do the cultured people of modern times suffer this to go on? How do they permit this?" murmured the educated people in scorn. At the same time, there were there old men and women who took the dust from the feet of the Sadhus and put it on the crown of their heads. Divine qualities like renunciation, 'tapasya' and devotion to God are mental, not physical. Some people were of opinion that this procession exhibiting their genital organs was by no means a test of the spirit of renunciation etc. Let people with their minds distorted by modern education say what they will—deride these Sadhus as a burden to Mother Earth or as fallen fellows of the lowest caste—still let us remember there are other people in the world who devoutly wear the dust of their feet. Swamiji felt happy on seeing sights beautiful or worthy of commendation and felt quite unhappy on coming across sights ugly or worthy of censure. After a few days he returned to Rishikesh. As his companions had left him on the way on their own errands, he was alone to reach Rishikesh.

There in his cottage he lived as before immersed in Divine thought and consequent joy. After a few days on a fine morning, a handsome youngman came to see him. Swamiji was then teaching Sareerika Bhashya. The new-comer prostrated himself before Swamiji and took his seat among the auidence. He listened to Swamiji's words with rapt attention. The lesson over, all others dispersed but the youngman remained and Swamiji talked to him. He was a brahmin youth from Sourashtra, well-versed in Sanskrit, and interested in Vedanta. Modest and good-natured, he was a good conversationalist too. Vallabharama Sarma was his name. After this first meeting he came to Swamiji every now and then to discuss Vedanta with him and gain fresh knowledge. Whenever he got time he came from far off Gujerat to Rishikesh to meet Swamiji. Having heard Soumya Kaseesa Stotram read out, he too expressed a desire to have it printed and got a manuscript copy of it for the purpose.

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At this time a princess named Sri Suratha Kumari Devi was staying at Swargasram out of her desire to associate with holy men and women. One day she sent a special messenger to Swamiji requesting him to be pleased to go over to her residence. With great devotion and respect she treated him to a luxurious bhiksha. To the bhiksha she had invited other sanyasins too. After the meal they spent much time plesantly narrating the stories of God. After this first meeting, every year when the princess came to Rishikesh or Hardwar she made it is rule to meet Swamiji. Often, forgetting her position and status, she came to Swamiji's cottages and attended the meetings there. That noble and devout lady often begged him "In the cold season please come to my capital and spend a month or two there. I greatly desire such meetings. If you don't like the idea of going over to my capital you can at least stay for some time in my palace on Mt. Neelakanta." But Swamiji did not comply with this request as he was by nature averse to such a life courts and capitals. He struck to his cottage on the principle "साधूनां स्वासनं वरं". He visited Brahmapuri, Neelakanta and such other lovely places just for the sake of enjoying their beauty. It was also his custom to express his views on the subject to other sanyasins in private as well as in public.

The wise and wealthy man should give away his wealth in charity. But that must be done with a good intention. Never aim at any reward. Those who think that sensuous enjoyment is the purpose of life and that their money is for such sensuous enjoyment are labouring under a fatal delusion; they fall without even reaching the way of beatitude; they lose all their wealsh. Money should be utilited to further the cause of righteousness; otherwise it is a heinous sin. Actually sensuous pleasures do not depend upon riches because even birds and beasts who have no wealth experience such pleasures. Wealth, therefore, is for the service of the world. What Maharshi Dadhyak said to Sutrama is perfectly correct. "Pleasures of the senses are common to all creatures". People inordinately fond of wealth and sensuous pleasures cannot even practise

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virtues. How far then will it be possible for them to devote themselves to the pursuit of the Supreme Truth? What one ought to do is to cut at the root of the delusion with the sword of holy company. Christ once said " It may be possible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, but it is impossible for a richman to pass through the gate of heaven " and he was perfectly right. " All this is God's; nothing is mine ". With this conviction, like a servant in a richman's house, one should do his duties in the spirit of worship. Let every man do his duty as an offering to God without any attachment to the result solely for the purification of the mind. With an appropriate formula of prayer must worship one of Rama, Krishna, Siva or Sakti whom he likes most, in the morning or evening, offering Him or Her flowers. He must repeat the mystic word (mantra) sacred to his chosen deity with joy. If he does so persistently and with all his heart and all his mind, God will be pleased with him; sins will be destroyed; love of God will grow from more to more. Man should give up the love for this perishable body. and sinful qualities like covetousness; he ought to try to acquire love of God and Divine qualities like renunciation. However wealthy a man may be, he can not eat gold or silver. To appease his hunger he must have food. Then, why entertain such love of money as if it alone can save his life? " Paths of glory lead but to the grave." All one's name and fame and position will not give him eternal happiness. So leave off that low fleeting pleasure that comes from other people's regard and respect, from sensuous enjoyments and seek that sound, satisfying, everlasting happiness arising from the practice of virtue. The resources placed at your disposal by God should be utilised for the worship of God. This universe is His, it is His limb, and so service of the world is worship of God. All things have been created to sustain life and through life to enable man to worship Him and realize Him; they were not made for sensuous enjoyment. " We eat that we may live; we live that we may enjoy the pleasures of the senses ". Give up such thoughts and make use of your life to realise Him. Whether a man is an emperor or a begger, whether he is a scholar or an ignoramus, without the thought of God and devotion to Him, who has found pacee

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of mind? Of all mankind, he who has realized God is the noblest and the best. He is free from all delusion; he is ever content, and deserves to be remembered by all. All must aim at that state. Plenty of wealth, a charming wife, noble birth, covetable position—these can delight man only like the vain mirage. Do away with all delusions, give up all baseness and worship the Lord who grants the Kingdom of bliss to His devotees. Worship Him! Worship Him!

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CHAPTER 8

After winter Swamiji desired to go to Badrinath hallowed by the dust from the lotus feet of many many Rishis. The celebrated Badri is beautiful with divine sights, full of peace, and dear to the hearts of all those steeped in the contemplation of Brahman. Swamiji who had already realized his oneness with Brahman started for the holy place all alone. Charmed by the natural beauty of the Himalayas he hardly felt the weariness of the journey. This was his second visit to Badrinath. On this occasion, however, he got no cottage for his stay. So he took up residence in a solitary cave on the opposite side of the Ganga. In that narrow cave all his time was devoted to the contemplation of Brahman and of the oneness of Jeevatma with Paramatma. In that cave, control of the senses required no effort and so according to the Vedantic tenet "यच्छेद्वाङ्मनसी" it was perfectly easy to control the mind and the intellect.

It was in the cave of Vyasa that Swamiji experienced cavern-life for the first time. On the way to Kailas and Thrilokinath he had, of course, stayed in caves for the night but never had he lived in a cave for a considerable stretch of time. Dwelling in the cave is helpful to mental concentration, but he also learnt a few days' experience that such a prolonged stay is detrimental to physical health. Still, as it could generate dispassion and the spirit of renunciation and develop them, Swamiji liked it and enjoyed the sense of peace arising out of it at various places later on. Every day he bathed in the hot water pool and worshipped at the shrine of Sri Narayana. On certain days he visited the temple at sunset also. The Raval or chief priest of the temple at the time was a Kerala Brahmin named Sri Vasudevan Namboori. He had already heard of Swamiji from newspapers, especially because Swamiji also was from Kerala. When he met Swamiji face to face at Badri, he was overjoyed. He received Swamiji with respect. A learned man, well up in scriptures named Purushothama Sastri, who was serving as a minister to Ravalji, too treated him almost reverentially. They used to talk in Sanskrit. On some days when there were not

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many visitors to the temple, after the evening worship, both of them sat on a flat piece of stone near the tower of the temple and carried on discussions in Malayalam or Sanskrit in the very presence of Sri Badri Narayana. It was a delightful experience to Swamiji. Not only the use of Malayalam, but also the close resemblance in the forms of worship between Badri and Guruvayoor reminded Swamiji of the sacred temples of Malabar. The sight of the plain over two miles in extent on either bank of the Alakananda and the two famous and very high Himalayan peaks covered with snow named Nara and Narayana, afforded him great joy. Everyday, when he went out on evening walk, he enjoyed the heavenly beauty of the plain. The Gaudapada rock on which Sri Gaudapada sat when writing his very famous Mandukya Karika; The Ganesa cave where Sri Ganapati dwelt while he was taking down the stanzas of Mahabharata flowing freely and almost interminably from the mouth of Sri Vyasa; the very cave of Vysya where Sri Veda-vyasa lived; the Muchukunda cave where King Muchukunda, whom Sri Krishna blessed, lived worshipping Him, these and similar places, reminders of the Puranik stories, became seats of his meditation and grounds of his diversion. Swamiji did not give credence to all such stories but he went about these places with great faith, reverence and delight. It became a custom with him to visit the Vyasa Cave above the village of Mana.

Having thus spent some days in the joy of Divine contemplation he set out with two other sanyasins to visit the famous lake "Satyapatha". On the way they reached Vasudhara six miles away. They had to cover as many miles again to reach chakratheertha. The route, covered with snow, was difficult and terrible. For common people it was almost impassable. Swamiji and his companions went forward though with difficulty and arrived at Chakratheertha by sunset. There was not a piece of fuel or any other means of lighting a fire to provide them with a little heart. A true sanyasin, Swamiji spent the night on a rock in the open with boundless patience. Great indeed was the discomfort caused by the benumbing cold. In the morning when he got up he saw an old friend

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Sri Krishnacharya from Rishikesh. At his tent Swamiji had his tea and then continued the journey along that difficult route. Soon he came across a wide snow-covered plain near the famous Himalayan peak, Choukhamba, rising dazzlingly white into the sky. Wide with wonder, his eyes drank in the beauty of the landscape. There the glacier " Satyapatha " joins another glacier " Bhageeratha Kharak " and gives rise to the stream Alakananda. The wonderful Gangotri glacier which starts from another part of the same mountain is the source of the Ganga. All those who reach there can see for themselves that the view both the Alakananda and the Ganga have their sources in the same region, is not incorrect. That day was not very clear. So Swamiji could see Lake Suryakunda alias Satyapatha and Swargorohini whereby Yuddhistira passed on to heaven, only indistinctly from a distance. There were no conveniences or provisions to spend a day there. So he had to be satisfied with a general look at Choukhamba. Then he slowly climbed down. He returned to Badri in the middle of Ashadha (June-July) after seeing the wonderful and sacred land of the last journey of the Pandavas and settled down again to a regular life of tapasya and contemplation.

At this time, certain sanyasins from Bengal and the Punjab, having worshipped at Badri, were making preparation to visit Kailas. They wished to have Swamiji's company especially because he had been to Kailas once before. Among them there were two or three sadhus who had been already acquainted with Swamiji. With great respect they approached Swamiji and said, " You needn't bother about cooking food on the way and such things—we shall do all that ourselves ". Swamiji who had ever been inordinately eager to visit beautiful landscapes, pressed thus in a very friendly way, began to think. " To see Kailas once again! What an immense good fortune! But—where are those provisions and equipment for that hard journey?—Carpet, money?? If it is God's will all that will come in good time ". With such thoughts he spent some days. " Man proposes; God disposes ". And the merciful Lord decided that he should have that ineffable joy again for his meritorious actions in previous lives. Accordingly everything necessary

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for a travel in ice-bound regions reached him effortlessly. In these pages reference has already been made to one Sri Vallabha Rama Sarma from Gujarat. His father Sri Viswanatha Sarma and a devotee of his, a rich merchant from the town Mohanayi, were then at Badrinath. When they heard about Swamiji's proposed journey they provided him with clothes, and some money. Ravalji, Sri Vasudevan Namboori, too, heard of the intended pilgirimage and respectfully requested him to take as much money as he wanted and other provisions from the temple treasury and store without any compunction whatsoever". Out of consideration for the feelings of so sincere a friend, Swamiji had thus to accept some money. Besides, Sri Saswathananda Swamiji who was then residing at Rishikesh decided to accompany Swamiji with a disciple of his. By the grace of the Lord of Kailas everything necessary for the trip thus came in. In the early part of Sravan (July-August), with eighteen other Sanyasins, Swamiji again set out for Kailas after worshipping Sri Badri narayana with word, deed and thought. Hearing of this journey to Kailas, Princess Surathba Devi at Rishikesh sent some money to Swamiji but before the gift arrived at Badri, Swamiji had already departed from the place.

The party passed the first night in a temporary tent put up by the Hindus and the Buddhists in a village called "Mana" near Badrinath. Next day they continued their journey northwards along the bank of Saraswati, a tributary of Alakananda. Beyond that point there is no human habitation because of the abundance of snow. They prepared their lunch at the confluence of the two rivers the Saraswati and the Arva, at a place called Gastoli. After the meal they pushed forward till night fall. In the morning they betook themselves again to the journey. Now the Himalayan peaks, covered with thick snow and glittering like burnished silver in the rays of the sun terrible for travellers and beautiful to sighteseers, began to make their appearance. The way was getting increasingly difficult and the discomforts caused by the journey were steadily on the increase. It was indescribably cold. In the morning, until the entire landscape was steeped in sunshine, the heaps of now shone red and white like plates of copper and of silver.

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It may be briefly said that Swamiji's mind was immersed in the sea of natural beauty. Drinking the elixir of beauty Swamiji and his party forgot everything else and moved forward step by step up the mountain for four days continually and reached the top of the grand and lofty pass called Managhat. Some m rchants from Bhutan, pushing quickly forward, joined them at the top. On that extensive plain covered with snow there is a circular lake called Deva Sarovar. On that spot, surrounded by peaks of dazzling snow, the party decided to spend their night as there was no choice left to them. That dangerous place was in no way fit for encampment. But the travellers, their servants and animals were altogether exhausted and too tired to take another step. With the firm conviction that God alone is the help and refuge of his devotes, Swamiji seated himself there. Some of the members of the party had stopped on the way, being to exhausted to keep up with the rest.

Before sunset, three or four sadhus among Swamiji's followers, pitched a small tent at a place where there was no snow, on the shore of Devasarowar. As there was no fuel there was no question of cooking food. From Badri they had brought with them some flour of wheat fried in ghee and mixed with honey. On the way, it was by eating a little of this flour that they appeased their hunger. Now alsa they consumed a little of it, using the water produced by melting a small quantity of ice with difficulty. Alas! on that Pass as dreadful as the jaws of Death, none can remain free from thought even for a few minutes. But, Swamiji drunk with the beauty of nature, like a man intoxicated with wine, did not advert to the frightfulness of that fear—inspiring place. In his mind absorbed in super natural beauty there was no room for any other thought. Till eight or nine in the night Swamiji sat outside the tent looking intently at the unique beauty of the snowcapped mountain peaks. How wonderful! Nowhere else had he ever seen such a manifestation of the beauty of the Divine creation. It is impossible to do justice to that spectacle in words. Even a Valmiki or a Kalidasa could not have done it. Everybody in the tent fell asleep. Finding the cold outside unbearable, Swamiji too entered the tent, spread his woollen blanket on the floor

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and laid himself down. But, can people, born and brought up in a hot climate, find sleep in the extreme cold of the Himalayan heights? The thought, what would happen to them if it started snowing in the night, also hindered sleep. In fact, in that night clouds did appear in the sky, but they passed off after a shower of hailstones. There was no snowing. Looking upon this as a favour of the merciful Lord, the Sadhus rejoiced and their mind regained peace.

In the morning it was so cold that when the pilgrims got up, water was exuding from their eyes and their noses. Yet the party, proceeding slowly, crossed the lofty and formidable Pass, though with difficulty. They got down on the other side still more slowly and before sundown reached a place on the plain below, suitable for rest. What was the name by which Mana Pass known in ancient times? It is a subject for scholars interested in research to investigate. The Puranas say that Sri Krishna, with the Pandavas, crossed this pass on the way to Kailas. There are stories in the epics to the effect that Sri Rama went this way to Kailas with Lakshmana. Kalidas in his Megha Sandesa (Cloud Messenger) refers to the " Crouncha Randhra " through which the royal swans pass from Mansarowar to Bharat. To identify this " Crouncha Randhra " and other randhras with particular passes in the Himalayas is not easy. Nobody has attempted that so far. Swamiji spent two nights at Mana Pass and then resumed his journey. Soon, the world-famous plains of Tibet came into view. On these plains covered with short green grass there were no trees or creepers or rocks. Hundreds of wild horses were roaming about on the plain. The sight filled the pilgrims with wonder and delight. On reaching the plain Swamiji felt as if he had been lifted into a wonderland, singularly sacred. As they advanced along these plains here and there they came across villagers living in their caves. Their extraordinary physiognomy and character reminded Swamiji the Kinnaras and Nairirthas described in the Puranas. At the end of ten days of such travel they reached Thholinga capital of Western Tibet. The town stands on the Satadru (Satlej). The most interesting institution there is ' Thholinga Madhom ' the famous lamassery of the Buddhists. Close to the outer

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walls of the Madhom the pilgrims put up their tent and spent four days there. Everyday Swamiji went to the Madhom decorated with white and yellow flags and protected by lofty walls all around and worshipped the images of the Buddha and other Gods, with devout prostration and other rites. Several hundreds of Buddhist monks called lamas were living there a retired life of meditation and acts of devotion. When the act of worship was going on, Swamiji sat on the same seat with them, learnt the forms of their lessons, hymn-singing etc. and also freely discussed religious subjects with them. One day Swamiji visited a brilliant Mandaleswar of the lamas at his palatial residence. The Head of the lamas was seated on beautiful layers of blankets. As he had already received a letter of introduction from the Temple of Badri, he received them with unusual respect and treated them in a befitting manner. They talked long and lovingly with the help of an interpreter. Besides, they were shown the several rooms within the lamassery, an honour rarely meted out to ordinary foreigners: In addition to all this, that noble and munificent Mandaleswar made every arrangement to help them on their way from there to Kailas. Taking leave of him Swamiji and his party set forward. As they now had two chamara deer to carry their food, clothing etc., they could move about with less discomfort. Crossing extensive plains and broad rivers and small streams they proceeded slowly, resting on the way, and in ten or twelve days reached Jnanima, a well-known centre of trade and commerce. Indeed, with innumerable sights, strange and wonderful, unseen in other lands, Tibet appeared very picturesque. They passed the night comfortably in the villages on the way. When the party reached a big and beautiful village called Dappa, the head of the village received them with respect and rendered them all help according to the instructions received from the head of the Thholinga Mutt.

One night, on their way to a village called Sivachilingom, while resting on the bank of a river, the party was thrown into a fluttter at the prospect of an imminent attack by robbers. After nightfall a spy of the gang visited them. He entered Swamiji's tent and narrowly observed everything. Then turn-

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ing to Swamiji in ochre-coloured robes he said, " You are a true lama. Some others of your party also are lamas. But there are also some rich fellows in the group who have with them plenty of clothes and other valuable possessions. We shall plunder them ". Hearing his words, Swamiji invited him to take a seat within the tent and sitting down near him in a friendly way began to talk to him in gestures. Before long the robber was converted into a devotee. He presented Swamiji with dried curds (commonly used in those parts) and a cup of salted tea. Swamiji told him. "I am not the only lama in this group. All are lamas. There is no wealthy fellow here, as you suspect, in possession of costly things ". Swamiji's words were such as to inspire faith. Swamiji was fearless and unperturbed as he had no valuable possessions of his own. He was therefore able to save the lives of the others too. It is not possible to give here an account of the incident in detail, howsoever interesting it might be. All that night the pilgrims kept their vigil, not knowing when they might be subjected to an attack and put to the sword. They were busy considering plans of escape and the night seemed unconscionably long. By the grace of God the robbers did not turn up. Early in the morning the company set forward. For fear of an attack in day light they pushed forward, on and on, stopping nowhere on the way to rest or even to cook food. In the afternoon some tents appeared at a distance. " It must be robbers ", they thought. For fear of robbers they sat down trembling on the ground, none being prepared to take one more step towards them.

Under the strong conviction " No harm can come to him whom God protects " Swamiji in the company of Swami Saswatananda proceeded without fear or hesitation, towards the tents. Lo! What did they see there? Swami Brahma, an intimate friend of Swamiji, to whom reference has been made in earlier pages, was on his way back from Kailas. He was travelling with a band of merchants. Catching sight of Swamiji from a distance he came to Swamiji with a beaming face, and raining down flowers on Swamiji, prostrated himself before him, welcoming him. Their happiness knew no bounds.

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By an irony of experience Swamiji's party had taken friends for enemies, as a garland of flowers is sometimes mistaken for a serpent. Swamiji who was overjoyed and the other Sadhus who now came up spent the night there. With good food and sound sleep they woke up next day refreshed and happy. Swamiji could now fully appreciate the startling difference between pilgrimages to Kailas with possessions and without them. What a sense of freedom, pleasure and fearlessness characterised his first journey without any valuable possessions depending solely on daily 'bhiksha!" How different was the second! This time his party carried plenty of provisions, but what fear, what sorrow, what lack of freedom marred the pleasure of that journey! Truly did Sri Sankara say "कौपीनवन्तः खलु भाग्यवन्तः" Next morning, when Swamiji started again, Brahmaswamiji, joined his party. He had indeed visited Kailas and was just returning but one of his desires still remained unfulfilled. He had wished to dip himself in the holy waters of Manasa, but that had not been done. Partly that desire and partly his friendship for Swamiji, induced him to return to Kailas. On reaching Jnanima they pitched a tent and rested there for two or three days. Then in the company of some Government officers they passed through regions infested by robbers, without fear or molestation; crossed broad streams on the way and at last reached the holy place Darchana on the plain at the foot of Mt. Kailas.

On arriving at the foot of the Sacred abode of Sri Parameswara, a place hardly accessible to common people, they prostrated themselves with devotion. Only those who have devoted all their life to the worship of the Lord and found their emancipation can ever reach this place. On this previous visit Swamiji had not been able to perform the circumambulation of Mt. Kailas. This time he was fortunately able to accomplish it on the Krishna Ashtami day, thanks to the merit he had amassed by his actions. That gave him great satisfaction and happiness. A royal personage, Head of the Village of Darchan, out of regard for Swamiji, accompanied him on his circumambulation with his followers. That saved Swamiji

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and his party much inconvenience and discomfort on the way. The monks in the monasteries en route received them with respect and entertained them with liberality. Swamiji worshipped Lord Buddha at these monasteries and carried on religious discussions with the learned lamas. That his hosts were Buddhists did not prevent him from accepting the food they offered him respectfully. He bathed in a small lake called Gourikunda, the surface of which was frozen. Having thus completed the circumambulation of the mountain in a couple of days, Swamiji returned to his residence at Darchan. During his five days' stay there several Buddhist monks and nuns, men and women, boys and girls living in that region came again and again to pay their respects to Swamiji. Once he went to a beautiful and attractive asrama in a cave and met a very bright and saintly person living there. It was a delightful experience. Like the Kumbhamelas held once in twelve years at Hardwar and other places, an assembly is held on the plain before Kailas at the end of twelve years. It was during such a festival that Swamiji happened to arrive there. A large concourse of people had gathered at the place, consisting of not only monks and nuns from Lhasa, the capital, but also men and women of aristocratic families. To see them all was a pleasant experience. On the circumambulation several nuns were seen prostrating themselves at every step. They had brought no food with them; they depended solely on powdered popped corn, got by chance, for sustenance. The way, so full of rock and stone, sand and blocks of ice was difficult to traverse even for men with their shoes on. It was along this route that these nuns passed on prostrating themselves at every step and repeating "Om name peme hum"—a corruption of "Om Mani padme hum". It is a custom with the Sadhus and the householders of this region to repeat this formula continuously and endlessly, turning a small gadget held in their hand.

Swamiji and his followers now set out for Manasarowar, ten miles to the South East of Kailas. Two days they spent there and dipped themselves in the holy waters. It is true, some very devout people perform the very difficult circumambulation of the lake too but Swamiji did not attempt it. Nor

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did he try to fulfil a long-cherished desire to spend some months near Kailas or on the shore of Manasa in ' tapasya ', as he was not alone, but had a number of followers with him.

Lake Manasa, like the mind of the gods, is so clean, so extensive, so grand and so deep. The cool and pretty lake that clears off the sorrows and sins of her devotees is ever full and in every way adorable. The red and pink glow at sunrise and sunset, reflected in the dark blue waters of the lake, increases its beauty a thousand fold. The charms of the lake captivate the hearts of even the knowers of Brahman and fill them with delight. Whether enlightened or ignorant, whom will not true and spotless beauty move? On the second journey too, as on the first journey, Swamiji was able to enjoy the Supramundane and ineffable beauty of Kailas and the Manasa and their spiritual effulgence. All those who have actually experienced the strange beauty of these inaccessible regions will certainly admit that the allegorical stories and hyperboles employed by ancient rishis in their descriptions are in no way out of place. Moving forward Swamiji and his party passed a night on the lovely shore of the Rakshasasarovar also. As it is from this heavenly region of Kailas and Manasarowar that the four rivers, the Sindhu, the Satadru (Satlej), the Brahmaputra and the Karnali originate, it has become the source of India's natural, material, spiritual and other wealth. That is why we, people of Bharat, feel such a devotion to this region as we feel towards our motherland.

From Rakshasasarowar, it was to Taklakrodam twenty-four miles away, that Swamiji went. Taklakrodam is a big village, and a famous centre of trade. Passing along beautiful and extensive plains like Gowriguha, he reached his destination in two days. He rested there two or three days. The stay was comfortable because all amenities of life were easily available. In the course of these two days he visited the lamas living in their lamasseries up the hills and also the native Sanyasins and talked to them for a long time. Just for a diversion he met also a big government officer living near the lamassery.

On a bright and clear day Swamiji crossed the Lippu Pass by the grace of God, without any of the discomforts of the

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previous occasion. It was the month of Bhadrapada (August-September). The sides of the mountains and fields big and small, were all green. Crossing these the party reached a village called Darchula, ninety miles from Taklakrodam in ten days. At the local Sri Ramakrishnasrama, they rested four days in great comfort, thanks to the liberality of Sri Anubhavananda Swami, President of the Asrama. Then Swamiji set out from there with two or three Sanyasins including Swami Saswathananda. Of the large party that had accompanied Swamiji to Kailas, some had left on their own, in Tibet itself. Some had gone to Nepal from Taklakrodam. Two stayed behind at the Sri Ramakrishnasrama. In five or six days Swamiji reached Veninagam. From Darchula to Almora, by mountain route, the distance is a hundred miles. Veninag is a little higher up. Directing Swami Saswathananda and others to proceed by bus, Swamiji set out all alone on foot along mountain route to Rishikesh. Wandering among lonely, peaceful and beautiful mountain was ever dear to Swamiji, especially beause it is conducive to mental concentration. On the evening of the second day he reached a theertha called Vageswaram, on the bank of the river Sarayu. It was only after staying a few days at that beautiful spot that he resumed his journey. The source of the Sarayu, dear to Sri Ramachandra called Sarayumoolam and the heap of snow called Pindara, could be seen to the North at no great distance, attracting the hearts of travellers by their splendour and holiness. Travelling from there on foot for nine days he reached Karna Prayag, already familiar to him, near Badrinath. At this time an agitation against the government was going on. Some youngmen who saw Swamiji with his tall, fair figure and spotlessly clean robes of ochre-colour, took him for a government C.I.D. Officer. Swamiji explained to them that he was only a pilgrim returning from Kailas. The explanation satisfied them. It is no wonder. People are of different states of mind. Each sees the other through his own spectacles. Swamiji stayed two days at Karna Prayag in response to a pressing request by a Swami, one of Swamiji's old acquaintances. The way from Karna Prayag was already known to him. Staying a few days at

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important places on the way like Rudra Prayag, Srinagar, and Deva Prayag and enjoying the beauty of the Himalayas all along, whether at rest or on travel, as well as the beauty of the Supreme spirit, he travelled slowly and reached his residence at Rishikesh after several days. Thus in 1930 A.D., inspired by the Lord of Kailas, in a way all unexpected he travelled one month in the holy Tibet full of wonderful and arresting sights and two months in the lofty and solitary Himalayan regions and performed the very difficult pilgrimage to Kailas a second time. Then he returned to his grass hut in Naya jhati at Rishikesh and resumed his life of austerity and devotion.

It may briefly be said here that he passed his days there, studying the scriptures meeting good and virtuous people, and instructing the qualified in Vedanta. As a result of his second pilgrimage to Kailas there was one direct and important gain. He received many messages of congratulation from friends and devotees far and near and being compelled to answer them and to recount his wonderful experiences on the way, to those who were eager to hear them he had to go over the pilgrimage again and again in his mind and that brought him fresh pleasure. Several people raised the question, "Is this the true Kailas where Sri Parameswara dwells with his Divine spouse Parvati? Or is there another Kailas described in the Puranas?" Citing authorities Swamiji answered them:

"This is, of course, the famous and holy Kailas mentioned in the Puranas. It was here that Lord Siva dwelt with Sri Parvathi or still dwells. There is the familiar story of how the Pandavas, with their friend Sri Krishna and priest Dhoumya, went to Kailas. It is said that they took fifteen days to reach Kailas from Badri, and that they passed through strange and wonderful lands on the way before reaching the mount where they met and worshipped the Lord of the daughter of Himavan. For the Sinful and the unenlightened it is as impossible to see Him to-day as it was in old days. But to the devotees with good and holy minds He, who is the soul of everything, does still present Himself. The descriptions of Alakapuri, Kailas and Manasa given in Megh Sandesa by Kalidasa, also may be accepted as an authority. The words of trust worthy people

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belonging to Hinduism as well as Buddhism too provide incontrovertible evidence".

Meanwhile Sri Goswami published, from Lahore, Swamiji's Soumyakaseesastotra with fuller explanations of the notes written by Swamiji himself. Later on, Sri Vallabha Rama Sarma brought out a still better edition from Bombay. In an introduction to the book written by Swami Sivananda who is an adept both in Bhakti and Jnana, he praises the author in these words:

"This book" Sree Soumya Kaseesa Stotram" is written by H. H. Swami Tapovanji Maharaj, an eminent Sanskrit scholar of high erudition, severe Tapas and Adhyatmic (spiritual), Anubhava (realisation). Having seated himself amidst such gorgeous, elevating atmosphere of Uttarkasi in the temple of Viswanath, and with his heart being filled with profound devotion Swami Tapovanji began to compose 10 or 12 slokas of this "Sree Soumya Kasisa Stotram" daily and used to recite them before Lord Viswanath while he was spending his Chathurmasya there in 1929. He finished the whole stotra in 41 days.

People of devotional temperament will find a treasure in this book of Stotras. Men of Vichar also will find substantial ennobling ideas for philosophical ratiocination and reflection. That is the beauty and attractive feature of this book. This book is a masterpiece in style and thought."

Many learned men, newspapers and magazines of Kerala have bestowed "full throated" praise upon this book which is a beautiful blending of 'Bhakti and Jnana', like the enfluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna. A long established Malayalam paper wrote like this: "Let thinkers of truth, rich in sprituality remain where they will—in the heart of mountain caves if they will—the waves of their thought will break through the walls of caves and spread to the nooks and corners of the world. It is a combination of such thought waves we find as we go through Soumya Kaseesa Stotra. 'The world knoweth not its great-men" is a proverb that applies literally to this author. At the centre of Himavan, King among mountains, there is a holy spot called Uttarkasi. It was there he composed this Stotra in forty-one days while he was observing the Chathurmasya.

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ज्यत्युत्तरकाशीति सौम्यकाशीति च श्रुतम् ।
क्षेत्रं गोत्रकुलोत्तंसहिमवन्मध्यसंस्थितम् ॥
पञ्चक्रोश विशङ्कटं वरुणयाचास्या च संवेष्टितम् ।
भूभृद्भूषणवारणावत नितम्बालम्बि यद्भ्राजते ॥
गङ्गा यत्र च गायतीव मधुरं सामोर्मि तुङ्गस्वनै-
स्तप्यन्ते च तपोवितृष्णमतयो यत्रोल्वणंसाधवः ॥

In such words Swamiji himself has described Uttarkasi. In this Stotra, the essence of all the Upanishads has been presented in a succinct form, in a manner by no means dull but singularly interesting. This book, equally interesting to 'Bhaktas' and thinkers, will doubtlessly meet with the appreciation of the people of Kerala. In addition to this, the fact that the author is a son of Malabar enhances our pride in this book. People of Kerala will ever remain eager to obtain many more such books conducive to the welfare of the world from Swamiji. This book reminds us of the famous ancient work "Sree Vedapada Stavam".

When the book "Soumyakaseesa Stotram" was published, the devout 'Sadhus' and Brahmins of Uttarkasi felt very happy. The friends and scholars who were living far away encouraged Swamiji to compose more books of the same type. The publisher of the book, Sri Sarma, is an industrious scholar. Swamiji had been inducing him to write a commentary upon the book, in person when they met at Uttarkasi and by letter while he was away. Accordingly Sri Sarma began to write a commentary upon the book in Hindi briefly summarising all the principles of Vedanta. Sri Sarma is a Gujerati and so, perhaps, his Hindi may not be altogether free from grammatical blemishes. But the book deservedly gained the wide appreciation of learned men and students because of its highly interesting treatment, its lucidity and its remarkable independence of thought. The commentary that was thus completed in 1934 was published from Ahamedabad by Sri Sarma himself. Upon the composition of such a useful and beautiful commentary learned men congratulated him

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unreservedly. The great scholar who wrote the introduction to that edition, introduces Swamiji, the author of the original work, in these respectful and devout words.

"The book "Soumya Kasisa Stotra" is the quintessence of all the Upanishads extracted by H. H. Sri Tapovanji Maharaj, for the use of students of Vedanta. A clear and lucid arrangement, a quiet and yet grand style, a bright and beautiful language—these qualities enhance the beauty of the book. It was in a secluded hut at Sri Badrinath that I first made Swamiji's acquaintance. A shining face, a mild countenance, a pair of eyes overflowing with immortal sweetness—the very first sight invoked in me a holy feeling of adoration. And when he began to talk in his clear, sweet languages his noble image got indelibly imprinted upon my mind. It was a stanza from Yogavasishta that then cropped up in my mind:

विगतमानमदा मुदिताशयाः, शरदुपोढशशाङ्कसमत्विषः ।
प्रकृतसंव्यवहारविहारिणस्त्विह सुखं विचरन्ति महाधियः ।।

"Here, scholars who have renounced alike all honour and pride who are cheerful and produce joy like the moon of Autumn, who care only for the present, live freely and in comfort."

When winter was over Princess Surathha Devi came to Rishikesh and took up her residence at Ramasram. One evening she came to Swamiji and said, "I too desire to pay a visit to Kailas; if possible, this year itself. Swami Sivananda and Swami Advaitananda have kindly agreed to go with me. You have been to Kailas twice and so if you also join us, it will be a blessing to us." At once Swamiji replied in unmistakable terms, "I managed the very, very difficult pilgrimages to Kailas last year. I don't feel like going again this year. Besides, I dislike all lack of freedom. For one thing it is impossible to join such a crowd of men and women equipped in right royal style. So in this matter please don't expect any co-operation from me." Having shunned all such inducements he decided to go to Badri that year also for Chathurmasya. A scholarly friend of Swamiji, Sri Raghavacharya by name, was already making preparations to go to

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Badri with his disciples. Swamiji's devotees begged him again and again to accept the necessary provisons for the difficult journey. But Swamiji, under the vow of non-possession, rejected all those offers. He started from Rishikesh in the company of Sri Raghavacharya who had great devotion to him and walking fast arrived at Badri after a comfortable journey in fifteen or sixteen days, two or three days before the 'Sankrama'. Swamiji who always liked seclusion took up his residence in a new hermitage put up on the opposite bank of the Ganga by Kali Kambli Wallah. As he was better known in those regions than in the previous year, he was treated with honour by everybody and received special consideration at the hands of the authorities of the Kali Kambliwalla Satram.

In time, the sky was covered with clouds. The sun disappeared. The rains started in their vigour. It was indeed a time to test the endurance of the aspirants who were not yet well-established in their 'sadhanas'. The continual rains increased the cold and rendered it almost unbearable. Three or four days passed. One evening Swamiji was occupying his seat in the hermitage and performing acts of worship as usual. Just then it began to rain with unprecedented vigour. The sound produced by big drops of rain on the roof of the hermitage suggested the force of the rain. After some time the deafening noise ceased. Now even a murmur could be heard. Trusting that the rain had stopped Swamiji covered himself with a blanket and went to sleep. He slept soundly. In that piercing cold he did not get up or go out during the night. Early in the morning he completed his prayers and meditation, sitting up in bed. How quiet, grand and silent the atmosphere then was, is beyond words to describe. The sun rose. As usual Swamiji got up and opened the door. Lo! it was bright light everywhere. The whole land was covered with snow, thick bright snow.

The entire Badri, covered with a thick deep layer of snow, shone like a town of silver. Caught in the middle of that dazzling ocean of whiteness Swamiji forgot everything external. No fear, no wonder, not even a feeling of Cold. Gradually he lost all consciousness, rising into a world formless and nameless. The feeling of ego disappeared. Thanks to that

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surpassing loveliness nothing remained except the Supreme bliss of oneness. He was steeped in it. Indeed, Beauty is Truth, Truth is the Supreme elf and the Supreme Self is the ultimate Truth without a second. Swamiji, who was fully convinced of this, had similar experience not once, twice or thrice but numberless times before. Some times this Divine mood of deep bliss and oneness would last only for a brief period; sometimes it will last for a long time. For Swamiji, who was by nature, a worshipper of Truth, the sight of Natural. beauty was an important means of attaining mental peace. That was why he wandered so frequently among the difficult but charming Himalayan heights. Well, when the noise of the rain ceased, it was not really the end of rain; it was just a change of snow for water. The snow comes down like soft petals silent through the air. From the fact that the snow lay two feet deep everywhere, one could guess that the snowing had continued all through the night. Even at dawn, the snowing was not completely over. When the mind at last descended from that state of supreme bliss and became once again aware of the surroundings the very question of the preservation of his body began to vie him. "What shall I do here? I shall die of cold. How to reach the town on the other bank, walking over the snow that lies like a white pall over land and water?" He spent about half an hour pondering over this question. In the cottage there was not enough clothing, fire, fuel or food. In all the neighbourhood there was not another 'Sadhu' to come to his rescue. Even if he decided to walk over the limitless expanse of snow he had not even a stick to support himself with. But he did not lose heart. To reach the opposite bank where there was human habitation, he boldly decided to wrestle with the snow that was increasing every minute. Snow to right of him; snow to left of him; snow in front of him; snow behind him. Snow! Snow! Snow! Snow as far as eye could reach! Swamiji would take a few paces and would suddenly slip and fall; get up again and begin to walk again. Thus he crossed a very short distance in a very long time and at last reached the Kali Kambliwallah Satram. The manager kindly gave him everything he wanted—woollen blanket and all.

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He passed five or six days there in comfort. That snowing which continued unremittingly, day and night for four days after the Sankranti, worked great havoc among that year's pilgrims. For four days people worshipped God with sacrifices and gifts and at the end of that period the snowing came to an end. As soon as time and place became favourable Swamiji returned to the old secluded hut on the other bank. He continued his Tapas with long meditation and the joy of realization. Not far away from his cottage, there dwelt an old Brahmacharin called Parasuraman, in a cottage and in a cave there was an educated Sadhu usually called "Master" with whom Swamiji had got acquainted at Rishikesh. Of these, Master was found of reading books. Frequently he came to Swamiji's cottage and discussed Vedantic books in Sanksrit and English with him. He also brought tasty food to Swamiji. Later on, a disciple of Sri Swami Ramateertha named Ananda Swami came up and astrted living in a cottage nearby. He established friendly relation with Swamiji. It may not be out of place here to add that this Swami later on took up his permanent residence in Uttarkasi near Swamiji's cottage and cotinued his friendly relations with him. Another friend named Swami Krishnamacharya came up that year also from Rishikesh and went away in the direction of Kailas. Swamiji had again and again tried to prevent him from going to Kailas but he turned a deaf ear to all such counsel and set out on his own. He had two other sadhus with him and they were carrying costly blankets and various other provisions. A little later the news reached Rishikesh that Swami Krishna Acharya had been put to thesword by robbers. Swamiji felt very sad.

Thus Swamiji passed two months at Badri. Just before the month of Sravan (July-August) began, he set out for Vasudhara, in the company of a Nepali Sadhu named Atmananda. He stayed in a cave between Vasudhara and Alakananda. Atmananda daily ate the food that he had brought from Badri. In a cave close to Swamiji's residence there dwelt a pious shepherd who had come from the village of Mana. He used to bring milk and other offerings to Swamiji. In another cave, not far away resided a black, stout, uneducated sanyasin of a

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strange nature. It was the beginning of the month of Karkataga (July-August). The plain looked enchantingly beautiful with flowers of all colours—yellow, green, white, red etc. Swamiji, of course, did not know the names of all those flowers but their celestial appearance reminded him of the glories of creation.

There noisy streams sweeping down with irresistible might, heaps of snow lofty and grand, long and broad glaciers, beautiful flowers that are found only in icy regions, strange little birds and butterflies and singing brooks—all these were proclaiming the existence of God, night and day. Swamiji was ever thinking of and experiencing that Supreme One whose might manifests itself in these external things. He lived immersed in the boundless ocean of Divine Bliss. Having known Brahman he continued to see it externally and internally and in conscious as well as Superconscious states.

After spending some very happy days near Alakapuri, famous in the Puranas, Swamiji returned to Badri and took up his abode in the former hut once again. While residing there, one day, a desire to compose a stotra on Badrinath in a hundred stanzas took shape in his mind. Since then it became his habit to compose a few stanzas while he was out for a walk in the evening. On these walks he used to go so far as the Gaudapada Rock or the cave of Vyasa. Sitting there on some smooth rock he would write down what he composed in his mind that day. Then he would read out those stanzas to himself on returning to his cottage. As the famous temple was thronged with visitors it was not easy to find a secluded spot where he could sit and recite his stanzas undisturbed. He thus composed four bunches of twenty-five stanzas each condensing all the principles of Vedanta and dealing with Adhyaropa, Apavada, Sadhana, Sadhya etc.: The first of the stanzas read:

अधित्यकायां नरनारगिर्योरन्तर्भवायां भवशाखिबीजम् ।
जेजीयते कश्चिदभौमतेजः पुञ्जोदयः श्रीबदरीशसंज्ञः ॥

'In the valley between the two mountains Nara and Narayana, there shines a celestial mass of light called Badareesa, who is the seed of all this Universe."

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Swamiji felt highly gratified when he thought that he was composing the Stotra, howsoever trivial, in Badrikasrama where Sri Veda Vyasa, Sri Sankara and other Supreme masters produced Vedanta Bhashya, Sutra Bhashya and such marvellous classical works. It appeared to him as a boundless good fortune. Learning from the talk of common men about the Stotra, scholars like Sri Purushothama Sastri, who were residing in Badri, got the manuscript, read through it carefully and heartily congratulated the author. The Ravalji, too, read it and was mightily pleased. Then he said to Swamiji, " This stotra will be highly useful not only to the devotees of Badrinath but to all lovers of Vedanta. The Temple of Badrinath will meet the expenses of printing and publishing the book. Only, grant us the permission to do so ". Swamiji cheerfully acceded to this request. Accordingly for the good of the world, Ravalji Sri Vasudevan Namboori had it printed at the Venkiteswara Press, Bombay, with a Hindi commentary and published it. Swamiji was very much pleased to learn that the book met with appreciation both in holy places like Rishikesh where Vedantins and ' Bhaktas ' live and in Kerala where people value and enjoy productions of literary merit. Later on, a reputed scholar of Kerala, Pundit Sri Gopalan Nair, a commentator of several books on Vedanta, ripe in spiritual knowledge and practice, wrote a commentary on the book and published it.

A large number of travellers from far off places, Sanyasins and householders used to cross over to the other bank of the Alakananda in order to obtain a darshan of Swamiji. Some Brahmins who lived there, a Pahadi doctor called Ramlal, and the Sadhus from the low lands generally attended these meetings. They also rendered with devotion what service they could to Swamiji. Ravalji wished to send him ' Bhiksha ' regularly from the temple but Swamiji preferred to live on bhiksha obtained once a day from the Kali Kamblivallah Satram. When the season of Himalayan travels came to a close the employees of the Satram went down to the plains. Then the devout doctor took up on himself the loving duty of sending Bhiksha by a servant regularly at 10 O'clock everyday. The devout doctor who rendered such service to Swamiji remembered him with

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great reverence even when he had left the vicinity. He also used to renew his devotion by sending letters.

Once Swamiji climbed the Narayana mountain in the company of Raghavacharya and the brahmacharin. That holy spot where beauty is indescribable in words is the abode of Rishis and inaccessible to common mortals. For diversion, or to gain merit (as the enlightened say) he spent the whole days on the top of the mountain. Late in the night the returned after culling out some beautiful flowers which grow only on the tops of the Himalayas. During the rainy season, he used to travel along the bank of the Rishi Ganga flowing down the high Mt. Neelakanta, sometimes alone and sometimes with others, enjoying the beauty of the landscapes. He also once attended a grand festival called Mathamoorthi held at some distance, to the north of Badri. During the next month of Aswina (September-October) noticing the mountain sides growing rimy white, he finished off his 'tapas' at Badri and set out for the lower regions. Reaching Jyothrimutt, Swamiji and his companions worshipped Sri Narasimha and other Gods with devotion. The magnificence of Vishnu Prayag was such as to inspire wonder and devotion. To attend to certain urgent matters Sri Raghavacharya went in advance. Swamiji, on the contrary, moved forward slowly in the company of two Dandi Swamis. As he had visited Nanda Prayag, Karna Prayag, Rudraprayag, Deva Prayag and other places again and again he had friends and devotees in all of them. Accepting their hospitality and resting by the way he travelled slowly reaching Rishikesh in thirty days. By this time the month of Karthika (October-November) had come on. He resumed his tapas in his cottage at Rishikesh as before. In course of time the number of devout people eager to attend the Satsanga had increased and was increasing. Many of them prayed Swamiji to come down to Punjab, Gujerat and other places and teach the Supreme Truth, for a month or two. Several educated men from Kerala who met him persuaded him to go back to Kerala. "In language, customs and manners Kerala is certainly more familiar to you than these parts. So, if you return to your home district, you will be able to do much to compass.

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the welfare of the world. Why don't you come back to Kerala and bless your people with your presence?" With such loving words they sought to win him over. But Swamiji did not like to go back to the plains below Rishikesh, impart Brahmavidya or do anything else for the welfare of the world. After putting on the ochre-coloured robe and taking up his residence at Rishikesh, he never went below that holy place. His desire was even to go higher and higher, to places of peace and seclusion. He could not bear the thoughts of living in noisy cities. Let people regard this as a merit or demerit, according to their natural inclinations and outlook. Swamiji was not one to be tamely led by the varying thoughts and tastes of other people. However, that does not mean that he was averse to imparting Brahma Vidya. It is Swamiji's firm conviction that a Sadhu, wherever he be, whether in populous cities or secluded solitudes of mountain fastnesses, he can teach the Supreme Truth to the world and direct mankind into ways of virtue. The lives of the Sadhus, rich in Divine qualities do shine like models to all who care for matters of the spirit and spiritual elevation. Is there a better way of commenting upon the Vedic verses? What is the need of it? Besides, if, like some other Sanyasins of modern times, he wished to establish 'mutts' and temple it would have been easy to do so with the hearty co-operation of his numerous devotees. But no such desire ever entered his mind. That he regards only as the consummation of the merit he had acquired. He lived in a small grass hut for one man in early days; even so he lives today in a small cottage built of stone and mud, and he is supremely satisfied with it. Not that he rejects the idea of establishing 'mutts' and other institutions as an act of Nishkama Karma. Only he had no liking or taste for or skill in such worldly endeavour. That is all.

During summer his wish as usual was to go up into the Himalayas. He resolved to start from Rishikesh in Vaisakh (April-May) so as to spend his Chaturmasya at Gangotri. For sanyasins the capital is liberty. Being subject to nobody they are as free as the wind in their movements. Like householders they do not surrender themselves to sorrow, fear or anxiety.

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In such circumstances what is there to bind down a sadhu? The man-cow is tied down without a rope because of his " feeling of mine ". The very purpose of the life as a Sadhu is the emancipation from the sorrows of worldly existence. True Sanyasins are not worried about the future or the past for a Sadhu in the fourth stage nothing like woman, gold, wife, child, relations, etc., can become a hindrance to spiritual progress. Being attached to the body and bodily things the worldling lives as good as a dead man, oppressed and saddened by different kinds of fear arising out of attachment. A true Sanyasin is quite different. The knower of Self possessing discrimination, and dispassion, if he has physical and mental restraint, courage, detachment, etc., will become entitled to eternal Liberation. That does not deny to a householder the possibility of true knowledge or abidance in the Self. Like a bhikshu a householder also may enjoy the peace of mind that comes of the lack of sorrow and fear. But the freedom to wander wherever one likes like the birds of the air and the freedom from all mental distraction can belong only to a Sanyasin and to none else.

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CHAPTER 9

Towards the beginning of Vaisakh (April-May) Swamiji started from Rishikesh to Uttarkasi and travelled along a familiar route passing through Narendranagar. He was accompanied by a sanyasin from Kerala by name Vivekananda. On reaching Uttarkasi he took up his residence in the old Kailasram and spent two weeks there. During the stay he conducted classes on Vedanta for the benefit of Sadhus. A young sanyasin from Bengal called Swami Paramananda was among those who attended these lessons. Whether at Uttarkasi or Gangotri, as in Rishikesh, Swamiji used to teach Vedanta to apt pupils. Generally he taught them the Upanishads, Brahma Sutra and Bhagavad Geetha, a knowledge of which is so useful and essential to sadhus. At these places other books were hardly available.

In the month of Jyeshta (May-June) Swamiji set out for Gangotri with Swami Paramananda and Swami Vivekananda. They stayed at Gangotri in a two-storeyed cave in front of the temple of Ganga. Swami Paramananda was ever active and energetic. He knew no laziness. He was skilled in the management of wordly affairs and highly devoted to his guru. At Gangotri where life was usually full of difficulty Swamiji was therefore enabled to pass his days in spiritual thought and mental peace, without tasting any discomfort. As the pilgrims who penetrated into the region were generally eager to visit sadhus also, the life there was not altogether secluded or solitary. Still, the clam atmosphere of the place so conducive to the invocation of spiritual moods, provided him with divine peace and helped to experience unbroken Samadhi. The daily bath in the ice-cold water of the Ganga was in itself a sort of ' tapasya '. He felt the old saying that even a life at Gangotri, Badrikasrama and other Himalayan peaks is ' tapasya ' to be literally true. From Kali Kambliwallah temple he was adequately supplied with food, etc. Gangotri that lies between two very high mountain chains is neither very extensive nor so even as Badri. So, even a free, effortless evening ramble was impracticable. In Badri there were two villages Mana and Brahmani, but there was no human habitation in Gangotri. The worship at the

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temple of Ganga was conducted by brahmins who periodically come from a village sixteen miles below. These brahmins are not learned in scriptures but because of their inherited culture they have firm faith in Hindu practices and are devoted to Sadhus and saintly men. As Swamiji was living there in comfort a great calamity befell the region. As misfortune would have it, in the month of Sravan (July-August) there was a dangerous flood in the Ganga. All the houses on her banks were swept away and in no time Gangotri was plunged into unspeakable misery. Being close to the banks to the Ganga, Swamiji's cave too was flooded and it became uninhabitable. There were no human habitations anywhere in the neighbourhood and therefore Swamiji was compelled to shift his residence to a village below called Dharalee. The other two swamis also were with him. The inhabitants of Dharalee were uneducated but they were devoted to Sadhus. The two Swamis everyday went out collecting 'Madhukari bhiksha'. Thus a month and a half passed. Now, desiring to visit Gomukhi Swamiji returned to Gangotri. It was in the cave of Gowrikunda that he lived for some days at this time. The priests at the temple of Ganga devoutely supplied him with food. After the 'Samkrama' in the month of Aswina (September-October) Swamiji started with Swami Paramananda for Gomukhi. What a route! How difficult and dangerous! From Gangotri there was not even a track to follow. Over boulders of rock on the banks of the Ganga, along frightening mountain valleys, and through thickly wooded forests, they stepped forward very slowly battling with powerful mountain streams on the way. At the end of a day's arduous journey they reached a forest of Deodar trees. There they passed the very cold night sitting near a fire kindled under a deodar tree. In these days a very wealthy merchant has put up rest houses for the use of travellers along the route; in those days there was none. It was the beginning of Autumn; the sky was always clear and unclouded. Naturally the cold they had to suffer was intense. But it gave Swamiji the opportunity of enjoying the beauty of the landscapes. They passed the whole night, sitting near the fire laboriously kept blazing. In the morning they resumed their

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journey. The region they were now passing through was known as Bhoorjavasam (the home of the deodar trees). The place was remarkable for the rare flowers, grass, creepers, bowers, etc. Crossing the region they reached Pushpavasa. Swamiji's heart danced with joy as he beheld the loveliness of that mountain region surrounded by snow-capped mountains glittering in the dazzling light of the bright Autumn morning. He wondered whether he was still upon the Earth or had reached the world of the gods. His mind was now lifted up into an ineffable state of oneness with the Supreme Self.

Lo! the Gangotri glacier lay long and broad, shining in the sun. It looked like the incarnation of Divine beauty. Protected on both flanks by the snowy peaks the grand mother of Bheeshma renders Bharat Varsha holier and holier still. The beauty of this snow-bound region is such as to thrill the hearts of even brutes with joy. Then what about man with his fine aesthetic sensibilities? Some snowy peaks glittering like burnished silver, some others bright yellowish brown like molten gold, exhibiting their wonderful variety of beauty, arrest every eye. It is these lofty, grand, matchlessly splendid peaks, rising high into the sky that support the claim of Himavan to the title, King among mountains.

On reaching there Swamiji washed himself in the clear blue waters of that perfectly circular and beautiful lake called guryakunda. That Suryakunda has since been levelled with the ground owing to the fluctuation of the Ganga. It is from a cave shaped out of the heap of snow into a cow's mouth that the Ganga first emerges into view. It is extremely difficult to approach that grand and holy cave universally honoured. Only immense merit accumulated through several lives will ever enable a man to reach it. Threading his way with difficulty across massive blocks of snow as big as elephants in size he struggled forward and at last reached the mouth of the cave—a feat within the reach of only men of uncommon merit. The beauty of that divine spot is met with nowhere else in all the world. With wonder and humility Swamiji bathed there in the holy Ganga and sitting on a flat piece of rock worshipped the Mother of the world singing sacred hymns so her.

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No attempt is made here to describe Gomukha and Gangotri as this has been done in the two works " Sri Gomukhee Yatra " and " Gangotri Kshetra Mahatmyam " for fear of repetition. Well, let us continue the story. At 12 O' clock Swamiji prostrated himself and then got up from Sree Gomukha. Very slowly Swamiji and his companions began to retrace their steps. For fear of snowfall they walked on till night fall, without resting on the way. Thoroughly exhausted, they decided to pass the night in a cave. They appeased their hunger with uncooked wheat flour. They threw themselves upon beds of dry leaves and slept more soundly than the King of the devas himself. Outside there were clouds and what was more, there was snowfall down to the foot of the mountain. In the morning they got up and without minding the intensity of the cold set out for Gangotri which they reached before noon.

Extraordinary indeed is the spiritual influence of places like Gangotri and Gomukha, secluded and purely Satwik by nature. Swamiji too experienced the unique force that banishes all wordly thoughts and enables man to enjoy Divine bliss. He felt a deep-rooted and changeless affection for the places and he resolved to pay a visit to them every year. He was never inclined towards a life of worldly activities; his love was for places where he could carry on his ' tapasya ' unhindered. For a life withdrawn from worldly activities which place is more suited than these, in the whole of India? Every Sadhu desires to lead his life somewhere on the bank of the holy Ganga, dear to all the world as Mother, dearer still to the people of India. If that is so, among men of detachment who will not desire to lead a life of ' tapas ' on the snowy peaks at the source of the sacred river? Sadhus regard such a chance as a great boon attainable only by the merits earned in previous lives. Having made up his mind to return to the place again, Swamiji went back to Rishikesh to pass the cold season there.

The retirement to Gangotri during the hot season started in 1932 and by the boundless grace of Mother Ganga it was continued without a break, year after year, with ever-increasing zest. From that year Swamiji used to spend some months at Rishikesh, some at Uttarkasi and three or four at Gangotri.

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Though his devotees pressed him he did not go or reside elsewhere. His friends and devotees were gradually increasing. The learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, kings and subjects, natives and foreigners, modern graduates and old-fashioned scholars, men and women—people of such varied status flocked to Rishikesh to see him and hear him at his cottage. Their number was going up year after year. He used to cheer them all with discourses on devotion, true knowledge, morality and such subjects connected with divine life. Some of them were immensely rich and in their eagerness to serve him they were prepared to present him with invaluable luxuries. Though these offers were made out of deep love and devotion he looked down upon them with contempt, regarding them as an insult to his spirit of renunciation, dispassion and vow of non-possession. To make even a brief mention of the hospitality and reverence received in those days, would look like boasting and so it is carefully avoided. It is not to advertise Swamiji's greatness or for self-praise that this biography is written. It is intended only to give an account of Swamiji's activities or of the incidents of his life against their proper background. So, if certain incidents have been mentioned briefly and certain others have been dealt with in detail, and if readers feel that the writer's sense of proportion has been at fault, they will kindly forgive him. The writer does not presume that all things dealt with in the book are ideal or praiseworthy. Whether these are worthy or unworthy it is for the discriminating readers to decide. They have, of course, full liberty to do so. No action is good or bad for all time and under all circumstances. Actions of people change character according to their varying levels of knowledge, their culture, and their skill in inference and reasoning. Not all people regard the acceptance of Sanyasa as a meritorious act. Some laud it to the skies, others cry it down. Naturally, actions of Sanyasins also will not meet with universal approval. Let the world praise or ridicule—it is all the same. What is attempted here is to recount briefly certain incidents in Swamiji's life. If these are placed before the learned ones they might remember that it is done not to elicit praise from them.

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After passing the cold season at Rishikesh so honoured as served by devotees, Swamiji went to Uttarkasi. A few days later he left for Gangotri. When Sri Ganga Sankar, a friend of Swamiji, was at Rishikesh during the cold season to participate in the Satsanga, he had learnt of Swamiji's desire to stay at Gangotri. He had entrusted a sum of money to a Pahadi devotee to construct a new cave at Gangotri. Accordingly, at the instance of Swami Paramananda, who was skilled in such matters, a cave had been dug into a huge rock on mountain side at a place indicated by Swami Paramananda himself. The front of the cave was covered with a wall and provided with a door and made ready for occupation in a few days. There were two rooms in the cave and Swamiji began to reside there with two other sadhus. The place, however, was not secure. As it was too close to a mountain peak there was the fear that it might be covered up in a land slide, at any moment. The cave had been built there for lack of an alternative. Once, at night, swamiji stumbled and fell on the sharp stones and was badly wounded and bruised. It took some days to heal. But, being immersed in meditation and the study of scriptures, Swamiji was scarcely aware of the passage of time. The brahmins and the common people in the neighbourhood understood about Swamiji's great qualities and deep knowledge of the scriptures. Some people, fond of the society of the good and enlightened, some times put him questions on Karma, Bhakti and Jnana. Swamiji stayed in that new cave only for two years. During the second year Swami Paramananda was not with him; his place was taken by a brahmacharin called Krishnananda from Kerala. It was in the month of Jyeshta (May-June) that Swamiji took up abode in the cave. Towards the middle of Sravan (July-August) he suddenly put an end to his stay and set out for Uttarkasi. On the way he went to a village called Neelang near the northern boundary of the Himalayas and stayed there two days. It is about twenty miles away. Usually Swamiji left Gangotri only in Aswin (September-October). This time he felt an inner urge to leave the spot towards the middle of Karkataga (July-August). Just a few days after he left the cave, it rained heavily and the boulders

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of rock forced down by the powerful stream of water dashed against the cave and wrecked it completely. If Swamiji had been still in the cave he too would have been dashed to death. Mother Ganga had affectionately warned him in time and saved him from the jaws of death. For three years after the ruin of the cave, Swamiji passed his Chaturmasya wherever it was convenient to do so. In 1938 another devotee of Swamiji engaged the same Pahadi devotee to construct a cottage on the other bank of the Ganga. There the bank was broader and more beautiful. It was at this cottage that Swamiji lived without distraction year after year after the destruction of his cave. There he spent his days in uninterrupted bliss.

After Swamiji's first pilgrimage to Gomukha he recollected his emotions in tranquillity in the form of ten stanzas in the well-known metre Sardula Vikreeditha. The first stanza runs thus:

वन्दे वन्द्यपदाम्बुजद्वयममुं राजन्यवीराग्रणीम् ।
यस्यैकाग्रमहोग्रदीर्घतपसा नैस्तुल्यसीमाजुषा ॥
क्षेत्रं गोत्रवरेण्यमूर्धगमिदं जेजीयतेऽत्राच्युत ।
क्षेत्रस्पर्धि समस्त मस्तकनतं गंगोत्तरख्यातिमत् ॥

"I salute the great hero among the Kshatriyas, the hero with his adorable lotus feet. Was it not as the result of his concentrated, fierce and matchless 'tapas' that this Gangotri temple equal to the temple of Sri Narayana and revered by all the world, came to be established on the crest of the King of Mountains?"

Before long, Sri Vallabha Rama Sarma published these Stanzas in book form under the title "Sri Gomukhee Yatra". After this, several distinguished brahmins at Gangotri joined in a request to Swamiji. "There is not a single book describing the holiness of Gangotri temple. In the Kedarakhanda of the Skandapurana there are descriptions of Badrinath and some other temples but no word is said of Gangotri. So kindly compose a "Gangotri Mahatmyam" for the use of the devotees of Gangotri". Chief among the petitioners was Visweswara,

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who was a faithful devotee of Swamiji and had accompanied him to those impenetrable regions like Gomukha. At their request Swamiji decided to write a small book on the greatness and glory of Gangotri. As there was no mention of Gangotri in the Kedarakhanda, he collected all the stories current in the district on the subject and wrote Gangotri Kshetra Mahatmyam in two Cantos, in the form of a dialogue between Brahma and Narada.

ब्रह्मलोके महागोष्ठ्यां ब्रह्मणा चान्य दैवतैः ।
मुनिभिः सनकाद्यैश्च मण्डितायां महात्मभिः ॥

So the poem begins. Later on, he composed also another book "Sri Ganga Stotra" critically examining and explaining the various principles of the scriptures. In the book there are five bunches of stanzas composed in various metres. Of these works the earlier "Gangotri Kshetra Mahatmyam" was published by Sri Sarma in 1937 with a Hindi translation by the famous Hindi writer Sri Prabhudathha Brahmachari, and the latter "Ganga Stotram" in 1940. These three books, though short, were lofty and charming and scholars in distant places like Kerala as well as at Rishikesh and other neighbouring places praised them whole-heartedly.

An eminent scholar from Kerala, on seeing Swamiji's Ganga Stotra and Himagiri Vihar with photo of the author in three colours wrote like this:

"This book, Ganga Stotra, has for its subject goddess Ganga whose attributes purity, uniqueness, depth and greatness, etc., are those of Brahman itself. It presents in a condensed form, the truths of all the scriptures. It will be supremely attractive to all believers in God. Swamiji is one who has known all that is to be known. These compositions are part of his leela (sport). Being scrupulously faithful to the principle of Brahman which is ever Pure, All-knowing and free these are fruitful and blameless. In these books Swamiji is bestowing his blessings upon his devotees—the blessings of one who has already crossed the terrible ocean of worldliness. This deserves our admiration and appreciation.

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The charming portrait of Swamiji delights both the eye and the heart. Spending all his days in the immaculate Thapovanas of the Himalayan regions he has become one with them and his name therefore has become literally meaningful. That face which proclaims the steadfastness of the mind, is such as to arrest anybody's attention. From Brahmacharya he stepped directly into Sanyasa and received all the Samskaras and incessantly practised Brahmavidya making himself absolutely pure and scrupulously Satwik. The natural cheerfulness of his face is enough to render even sensual men pure and sinless.

Several great poets have described the wealth and glory of Himavan in a thousand ways, so as to touch the hearts of all men of refined feelings. But the descriptions by Swamiji are unique because they deal especially with the holiness and spiritual nature of Himavan as well as its power to produce tranquillity, purity of mind, etc. Even when he describes the size and shape of the King of Mountains, the view he adopts is calculated to help God-Realization, inspire spirituality and produce the attitude of dispassion. "Santa" (peace) is the main sentiment of his poetry; all other sentiments are subservient to it. He blends these sentiments in his composition in his own charming way. In them one comes across the wonderful story of his life as a sanyasin, the glory of the Himalayas, the hidden truths of spiritual life, the way to Self-realization through Bhakti, Jnana, etc.

It is a pretty long time since he left his native district, Kerala; but, his love for his mother tongue deserves special commendation. This book (Himagiri Viharam) written in a lucid and charming style is grand in the wealth of ideas and poetic in treatment. This will ever remain as a precious and beautiful garland around the neck of Kairali (Malayalam).

In 1946 the second edition of these three books was brought out as one volume with their Hindi translation. It was a scholar of Gangotri named Sri Vrinda Prasad who prepared the new translation of Gomukhee Yatra and Ganga Stotra. He was an industrious and devoted Brahmin youth who had learnt books on grammar and Vedant from Swamiji.

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While Swamiji was residing at Gangotri may educated young sanyasins had evinced an eager desire to learn Vedanta from him. The company of such virtuous and devoted young men was particularly pleasing in those secluded regions of the forests. At Gangotri there were then several mahatmas like Sri Sivananda Saraswathi, Sri Swami Krishnasramam, Sri Swami Prajnanath, and Sri Swami Kesavanandavadhutha; To see them and to talk to them was an exhilarating experience. Three or four years after Swamiji took up his abode at Gangotri, it became his custom to wander among the very high and magnificent snowpeaks for a few days accompanied by some followers. Among those companions one deserves special mention—a strong built, and active Kshatriya young man named Govindasimha. Similarly, among the sadhus an educated and diligent brahmacharin called Prabodhananda deserves to be mentioned. He was studying Vedanta sitting at the feet of Swamiji and by natural inclination he was fond of travel. He proved a very useful secretary to Swamiji on his wanderings. At the beginning of Sravan (July-August) Swamiji and his followers first went to an extensive plain called Rudra Gairu at the foot of a Himalayan peak. They followed a track marked by the foot prints of the bear, the musk deer and such animals and slowly climbed the lofty mountain and reached their destination on the evening of the second day. They put up a tent and spent three days on the plain. It was getting unbearably cold on account of continuous rain. But, fortunately, they received some help from the shepherds camping there. During the stay they joyously wandered here and there observing the peaks near Gangotri tapering high into the sky and the trees and plants and flowers fragrant and beautiful. Swamiji plucked many lovely flowers of all hues and shapes, wove them into a garland and holding it in his hand he returned to Gangotri with his companions, his heart swelling with joy.

On another occasion in the month of Bhadrapada (August-September) with two or three companions he climbed a peak called Srikanta, covered with snow from head to foot and glittering in sunlight, above a village called Dharali. On the first day they encamped on a bare tree-less plain some way up

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the mountain. Next day they reached the top of the peak. From there he drank in the beauty of the sight on all sides and sat there forgetting everything else in his joy. When he got up he performed the ablutious in one of the streams covered with sheets of ice and devoutly worshipped Lord Srikanta with wild flowers and sweet-meats. Subsequently, passing along the side of the mountain enriched and beautified by various kinds of plants and flowers, he returned to the camp by nightfall, all his senses gratified with sights, smell, taste, touch, etc., and his body thoroughly exhausted. He spent two or three days at Hariprayag, and set out for Uttarkasi. On the way, with the help of a native guide, he climbed the difficult mountain side above the village Sushki and visited Chhaya ghat. Chhaya ghat is a narrow track leading from Gangotri to Jumnotri over Himalayan peaks. He spent the whole day on the top of the mountain and then returned after mentally worshipping vanarapuchha from afar.

Next year, desiring to see the extensive plain Chatushkoshti, he set out for the place from Gangotri in the company of Swami Paramananda, brahmacharin Prabodhananda, and 'Pandas' (Brahmin Priests) like Visveswara and Govinda Sinha. They spent the night in the village Makhwa where the Brahmin priests of the Ganga reside. The two villages Makhwa and Dharali, on the opposite banks of the Ganga, and the sacred spot Hariprayag lower down the river, were dear to Swamiji as he had stayed at them again and again on the way to Gangotri and back, and as the villagers were devoted to him and the villages themselves were beautiful. He reached Chatushkoshti in a day's time, passing through a thick forest haunted by the bear, tiger, etc., along the course of a lovely river called Jalandhari or Guptaganga. Then he built a small cottage in a suitable place near a camp of shepherds and lived eight days in the place. Everyday he went about seeing the rare sights, and forgetting all else. On the very first day the party proceeded to Chatushkoshti. It was an extensive plain grown over with grass, creepers, etc., and beautiful to look at. He bathed in a small pond on the way, worshipped the Lord of Kailas and went forward over wonderful places, plucking rare and divine

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flowers like the Brahmakamala and entertaining himself till sun down. The Brahmakamala is a kind of land-lotus beautiful like the ordinary lotus, growing only on very high snow-capped mountains. It is regarded as a sacred flower capable of warding off ghosts, goblins, etc. Some poets have spoken of land-lotus as a mere figment of the imagination like the horn of the hare. Perhaps they were ignorant of this flower growing on the Himalayan heights or perhaps they felt the flower did not deserve the name 'Lotus'. Even at those great heights almost inaccessible to ordinary people, the shepherds presented Swamiji with plenty of milk. Good food and opportunities for entertainment freed him to immerse himself happily in the Divine glory and the days he passed there became unforgettable. In two days he reached Makhwa. While he was resting at cottages in the forest at night he could see bears devouring up lambs and hear the uproar created by the frightened sheep and still more frightened shepherds who banded themselves together to drive away the fierce wild animals. From Makhwa he returned to Uttarkasi.

Yet another year Swamiji climbed to the top of the high Matanga mountain in his eager desire to see Sumeru, the golden mountain. From there it is possible to get a clear view of that celestial mountain. He spent his night happily with the shepherds on a table land and on the second day he ascended to the very high top with immense difficulty. It was only his desire to see Mt. Sumeru that led him there. By the grace of the Omniscient God, the day was bright and clear throughout. There was not even a speck of cloud-what a great good fortune! Even if there were only a whiff of white smoky cloud it would have been impossible to see that peak. All the Herculean labours undertaken would have been in vain. It was all a stroke of Divine mercy. What a sight did he see there? Indescribable, matchless, wonderful, celestial! Every such epithet would have been applicable to that sight without the least bit of exaggeration. One can see not only Sumeru but also the still higher peak Bhrigupatha sometimes mistaken for Sumeru on account of their close resemblance or out of the ignorance of the speakers, and rows of other peaks dazzling by white. It

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is not possible to decide whether this Mt. Mahameru which is covered with thick layers of snow, and which shines like a decorated chariot of the gods, shining golden brown, is really a gold mountain or a mountain of yellow rock. For no man can actually reach it. Yet, a person who has seen the yellow rocky peaks in the vicinity of Gomukh can guess that the Mahameru which looks so Divine, also is such a mountain. It matters little whether the mountain is actually one of gold or of rock. It captivates the hearts of all refined men at first sight by its unique invincible grandeur, dignity, beauty, loftiness, etc. Besides, the students of Hindu Puranas, with bowed heads, will shed tears of joy and forget themselves in happiness, saying to themselves, "Indeed, I am blessed this day. My life's object is fulfilled for I have set my eyes upon the mountain of the gods". It is said that some explorers from Germany have actually scaled the mountain and reached the top. Whether this golden mountain is the very Sumeru described in the Puranas and the epics or whether the real Sumeru is elsewhere the Omniscient One alone knows. The marks of identification given in the Purnas, like the source of the Ganga, suggest, this golden mountain to be the real Mahameru, while the description of Brahmaloka, etc., seem to indicate the contrary. It is therefore very very difficult to arrive at a final conclusion. Swamiji worshipped the great mountain with great devotion offering divine flowers like the 'Brahmakamala' and sweet fruits like the grapes. After prostrating himself to Sumeru, in a mood of great joy, Swamiji, with Visweswara, started on his return journey, though rather unwillingly. Pacing slowly they reached their camp before nightfall. From the cottage in the valley they turned their foot-steps in the direction of Uttarkasi. They proceeded slowly resting at Makhwa and Hariprayag. Since then Swamiji has climbed to the top of Mt. Matanga twice but on both occasions the sky was cloudy and therefore he unluckily missed the chance of seeing Mt. Mahameru.

In some other years, during the Autumn season, he wandered two or three weeks along the bank of the Kedara Ganga which has its origin in a glacier starting from Mt. Kedaranath, towards

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the southern side of Gangotri, just to enjoy the beautiful landscapes and other pieces of natural beauty. The paths were dangerous and difficult and passed through thick forests. At every step there was fear of fall and death. Still Swamiji proceeded and at last reached a charming plain covered with shrubs in fresh leaf and blosom. That the tracks Swamiji had been following hitherto and was to follow hereafter were all terribly risky as if they were leading directly to the jaws of death, need not be emphasized here. Having reached the plain he sat down where there was no room for risk or fear and drank in the beauty of the peaks near the Kedaranath glacier. Here, there are some mountains brownish yellow like blazing fire, some dark as the rainbearing clouds—But all are beautiful in their own different ways. Among these mountains are Bhrigupathham, Meru, Keerthistambham and Bharatakutam. From there one can not see all the peaks between Gangotri and Kedaranath. But those that are visible are enough to delight anybody. Swamiji could not have enough of that bewitching loveliness. The famous peak Kedarnath and the place Kedarnath are quite close to each other. As Swamiji had no plan to pass the night there, he returned before the sunlight failed. He took no notice of all the obstacles on the way and somehow reached his cottage at Gangotri by nightfall.

At the beginning of the next Autumn, on his way back from Gangotri, he reached a village called Purali near Hariprayag. From there he went up a very high and almost inaccessible peak. On that peak near the unscalable mountain Vanarapuchha, there is a Divine lake. It was to see that lake frequented by the gods that Swamiji decided to go there with some companions. The laborious climbing went on from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. On reaching the top they saw a small but beautiful lake that filled them with wonder and joy. The sight around was such indeed as to drench all the senses with pleasure! Lovely flowers like the Brahmakamala, shrubs and creepers and climbers full of leaves and flowers, gurgling streams and lovely landscapes seen nowhere else—In the midst of such natural charm Swamiji rested for some time and then bathed in the holy lake with his two Brahmin companions. He

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offered flowers and sweet meats to the goddess of the lake and after acts of adoration, he stood on the top of the great peak enjoying the loveliness all around him. Presently dark clouds enveloped the sky. Since, at such heights, it is possible that snow fall might follow the appearance of clouds they began to climb down abruptly. As raining started their bodies got almost benumbed but assuming courage and relying on the mercy of God they climbed, down with all possible speed The lower they came, the less grew their discomfort. Along the route there was no place for rest. So they walked boldly forward, disregarding all risks from dangerous wild animals and by nine O'clock reached the village below.

The short account of the pilgrimage to Sri Gomukh is given here as the last; but in point of significance it must be regarded as the first. After the first visit Swamiji desired to visit it every year. But, for one reasons or another, he was not able to go there again for the next three or four years. Since 1937, however, thanks to the blessings of Mother Ganga, he has been to Gomukh without a break. In 1945 circumstances compelled him to stay on at Gangotri and so that year alone he had to break his custom. It is what gives man the utmost joy that becomes most dear to him. It is therefore no wonder the pilgrimage to Gomukh became most dear to him. To pass an increasingly large number of days in a hut at Gomukhi became a regular custom with him. Sometimes seven days, sometimes fifteen, once a full month he stayed at Gomukh. During the first two or three years the journey was very difficult. Since then a resthouse has been built and to that extent the difficulties have been reduced. The river Bhoorjevasa which has its source at the extensive and grand snow-bound plain called Bhrigupatha used to offer serious obstacles for pilgrims. Especially during the rains it endangered the safety of the travellers proceeding along its banks by its irresistible current. Once Swamiji crossed the river over a wooden bridge temporarily flung across the steam by shepherds and spent a few days in the vicinity of the very high peak Bhrigupathom. The rare beauty of the deodar trees and the celestial loveliness of the glacier at the source of the Bhoorjava now are indeed

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unrivalled. He also enjoyed the beauty of the glacier Manda. Specially attractive were the snow covered plains, so extensive, so high and so full of rare flowers like the brahma kamalam. Before he returned, he pucked plenty of such flowers and took them to his cottage. Thus there were no limits to his devotion to see Gomukh and the surrounding regions. If his stay there was long, he bathed in the holy waters more times. He also made offerings of sweet-meats, etc., to Mother Gomukh and then sitting at her feet he and his companions partook of the blessed offerings. Sometimes the milk of the sheep was collected from shephered and a kind of pudding was prepared and offered to her. The devotion to Gomukh and visits to it year after year helped to purify his mind still further and give him heavenly peace.

While Swamiji was thus spending his time at Sri Gomukh he used to travel even above Gomukh disregarding all dangers and hardships, partly out of his desire to enjoy the matchless beauty of the region and partly out of the eagerness to secure a bird's eye-view of the source of the Divine Ganga. Two miles up there is a plain called "Thapovanam". The ground is as even and as extensive as a football court. Swamiji specially liked the place that bore his own name. In the midst of the snow heaps here and there there were small lakes full of clear, blue water. In one of them Swamiji bathed between small ice bergs. Beyond a big glacier he could see Mt. Bhageerath. He deemed it a great good fortune to have obtained such a magnificent sight that evoked pleasure as well as wonder. Seeing the reddish brown glacier Keerthi glittering directly before him, excited with joy, he worshipped it with all due rites. Like the Keerthi glacier, the glacier Meru at the foot of Mt. Sivalinga also afforded him much pleasure. The famous Gangotri glacier thus extends several miles from Gomukh to the peak Choukhamba. The ancients call this region, so inaccessible as well as wonderful, Alakapuri. It is here that the Alakananda has her source. It is thus a well planned and civilized city, the abode of the Yakshas, Kinnaras, etc., that is described by poets like Vyasa and Kalidasa, as Alakapuri the capital of Kubera. Research students, however, believe Alakapuri to

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be a snow covered mountain peak dazzling in the bright sunshine. Not only Alakapurai but even Mt. Kailas, the abode of Lord Sri Parameswara Himself, is described in the ancient book as a divine city. Researchers hold, on the contrary, that it is a high, snow-white, snow-covered peak of the Himalayas. Let learned men decide how these conflicting views can be reconciled—That is by the way.

Students of geography unanimously admit that such abundance and splendour as characterise the region where the Ganga and the Alakananda originate are to be met with nowhere else in the world. Arising from so unique a region, they say, it is no wonder that the waters of these rivers possess such wonderful virtues. To the right of the Gangotri glacier that lies North-west are the Himalayan peaks, Choukhamba, Manthhani, Sumeru, Kedarnath, Sivalinga, etc.; to the left are Chandram, Sathyapathham, Vasuki, Bhageerath Parvat, etc., and these add to the beauty of the place a great deal. There are also several glaciers, wide, variegated and many coloured like the Himakeerthi, Sivachhanda, and Chathurangi, visible from the place, which render the scene one of indescribable splendour. Since Gomukha is encircled by chains of high mountains many peaks around are hidden from view. These become visible to those adventures who stir out of the place. From here it is possible to reach the Badrinarayana temple in three or four days by proceeding along the Chaturangi glacier (which is a tributary of the Gangotri glacier) and the Kalindi glacier (which is a sub-tributary) then crossing the mountain pass, again following the course of the river Arva, and reaching Gastoli and next moving along the bank of the river Saraswati. finally reaching Badri through Mana or Kesava Prayag. Some adventurous people do take that route. But Swamiji generally spent his days going up the glacier, enjoying the splendid sights and returning to his residence at Gomukh to pass the night. On one occasion he spent a full month at Gomukh. Once he crossed the Gangotri glacier, spent the night on the other bank, and visited the confluence of the two glaciers Gangotri and Chaturangi, near a waterfall " Rakta Varna " Though with great difficulty he climbed the top of Mt. Bhageerath

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where he saw the extensive tableland "Nandana Vanom" at a height of over 14,000 feet. He also saw the track leading to Badri. He then returned to Gomukh. How can a man describe the natural beauty and grandeur of that region? Even the divine poets like Valmiki and Kalidasa have not been able to describe a fraction of it and it can be asserted with full confidence that nobody in future will succeed in such an attempt He who dares attempt it can only render himself ridiculous, both to himself and to others. In short, the charms of the spot are to be experienced and not to be described. Alas! How did Kalidasa happen to conceive of the snow of the snow-mountain as spoiling its beauty? "हिमं न सौभाग्यविलोपि जाते"?

Our conviction as a result of long experience is that the snow adds to the beauty of Himavan, and not subtract from it. The dazzlingly white, wide, grand and wonderful glaciers and rows of immensely high, white-capped peaks—how much do they contribute to the glorious beauty of Himavan? That question can be answered only by personal experience, never by any amount of conjecture. We are led to guess that the great poet Kalidasa had not personally enjoyed the beauty of Himavan, resulting from its perpetual covering of snow. In fact, the Himalayas have become world-famous because of the presence of Hima (snow); certainly, not for any other reason. It can not but be rare even in heaven. This rare, charming, and natural beauty adds remarkably to the beauty of the Himalayas. Besides it must be remembered that this mountain is the source of the great and famous rivers Ganga, Sarayu, Jamuna, Brahmaputra, Satadru and Sindhu which are the source of Bharat's material and spiritual resources. Today one need not depend upon books or hearsay to realize the glorious beauty of Himavan; one can see it with one's own eyes. This golden mountain of divine and matchless beauty must be the Sumeru; the abode of Lord Sri Parameswara can not be other than this Kailas. If this is not Alakapuri, where else can that be? It is a fact established by direct experience as well as inference, that but for these glorious glaciers of ice, this mountain would never have become so famous all over the

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world. Swamiji considers it a result of the free and motiveless mercy of Mother Ganga, that till this year (1947) he has been able to visit and devoutly worship at Sri Gomukh for twelve years without a break.

Except during those few days when Swamiji was going about for diversion, discourses on Vedanta were given at Gangotri. Even at Gomukh, when he resided there for any considerable length of time, he used to conduct classes on Vedanta. Whether the devoted knowers of Truth ponder over Vedanta or not, whether they enjoy good company or not, whether they meditate or not, whether they worship or not, since there is eternal, unbroken experience of Self for them, what is the use of the study of Scriptures, meditation etc., for them? Still, out of their natural desire for the welfare of the Universe they engage themselves in imparting instruction, discussing the scriptures, and teaching Brahma Vidya. As many of those pilgrims who came to pay homage to Swamiji were devout and were interested in the acquisition of true Knowledge, he had to meet them frequently and clear their doubts for them. Among those who came to see him were men and women of different stations in life and were on different mental planes. Some of them, without any consideration of delicacy, asked him, "Revered Swamiji, what are you people doing here? Why not you stay somewhere on the populous plains and engage yourself in some useful national and patriotic work?" Swamiji modestly replied to their question. "It is good that you have reminded me. Even here I am serving our motherland. Know, there is no greater service than what I render. On the basis of my personal experience and the basis of the scriptures I am giving here practice to seekers of the Supreme Truth and imparting spiritual instruction to them. In this wordly existence red-hot with the fire of sorrow, all that gives relief and comfort and happiness is the peace of the Self. Men and women follow the purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha) solely to this end. People desire name and fame, position and wealth and status—all for this purpose. The peace of the Self, alas, looks like an invaluable treasure unattainable anywhere. If, through the spiritual advice of one, and his example of a calm,

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peaceful life, such pleace becomes attainable to the world, who does more good to the world than he? Let these great Rishis, who ever abide in the Self remain wherever they be, on mountain tops or caves, Know that they are the most invaluable ornaments to the world."

Since Swamiji stayed long at Gangotri, people of the place understood his holy life and character and began to praise him highly, for his severe 'tapas' and noble qualities. It is an observed fact that the number of a man's enemies increases in proportion to his wordly rise. The low valleys are subject only to the harassments of heavy rains. The high mountains, on the other hand, are subject also to the havoc caused by mighty winds. The still higher peaks are assailed by snow-falls too. But there is one difference. The low mountains are easily affected, disfigured or dissolved by the rains. On the contrary, the high mountains stand four square to the battering winds and terrible snow-falls. They are not broken up or destroyed by these natural forces shat assail them. It is the distinction of the truly great that under no circumstance they lose their balance or their dignity. Since all the mighty blows fail to dislocate them, they only add to their beauty by bringing out their nonchalance and invincibility.

Swamiji was rising fast in the esteem of the people. There were some who could not bear the worldly advancement that came to him unsought. No longer able to control themselves these envious people began to spread scandals to bring down Swamiji in public esteem. The chief point of their attack was that Swamiji was a non-Brahmin. In the past caste has inflicted great harm on society and by now it is as good as dead. Still some people sought to make it up. "परवृद्धिमत्सरि मनोहि मानिनाम्" says the poet. What will not the thirst for wealth and honour force mankind to do? Yet, all this vile propaganda failed to provoke Swamiji or to reduce his wordly status. Not only that; in the end all these proved to be to his best advantage. Trivial as this affair is, Swamiji mentions it only to show how thorny worldly prosperity is and how it increases the number of enemies. For the great ones who have realized

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God and know they are nothing but the homogeneous and true Self that never waxes or wanes, and who find unceasing bliss in the Supreme Self, rise and fall, honour and dishonour are all the same. But the ignorant may come to talk of these and that was why it was referred to previously as "Worldly rise". For Swamiji who had severed all connexion with worldly affairs and cut himself off from cities and cityfolk and was passing his days in the peaceful solitudes of the Himalayas counting Brahma Vidaya alone as his wealth and devoting all his time and attention to it, what gift from far off places unknown to him, had he to desire? If, in the eyes of some envious persons Swamiji appeared to be the recipient of honour, it must be remembered, such honour was not obtained at his desire; it had come to him unsought as the necessary effect of good actions. Who could destroy it?

It was at Gangotri that the news of India's attaining independence reached Swamiji in August, 1947. He rejoiced heartily over this liberation from foreign yoke. Liberty of the land, liberty of the body—such expressions have only worldly significance. Liberty, in the true sense, is different. Swamiji felt that it would be really a blessing if physical liberty were utilised to attain the real, that is, the spiritual liberation. He prayed that this freedom attained by God's grace or won by manly heroism might be preserved by the children of Bharat living as a single nation forgetting all differences of caste, creed or colour.

How did Swamiji live at Gangotri or Badri? How was a man physically so week enabled to live in such a rough and hard place so cold and so full of rocks and water and assailed by piercing cold winds? To this question there is but a single answer: the northern region, hallowed by the life of Sri Sankara, welcomes the sons of Kerala into her lap that affords imperishable bliss.

After this brief sketch of his life at Gangotri, something may be said about his life at Uttarkasi as well. Finding that, year after year, Swamiji went from Rishikesh only to Uttarkasi and Gangotri for a stay, and not to any other place, Sri Ganga Sankar decided to build a cottage at Uttarkasi for Swamiji's use. In 1935, at the foot of the Varanavata mountain, above Kailasarama,

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at the centre of Ujaily inhabited by Sadhus, two separate cottages were constructed facing the Ganga and were given as a gift to Swamiji. Since then, whenever Swamiji was at Uttarkasi, he stayed there free from all distractions. Swamiji lived in the bigger cottage and the smaller was occupied by some other Sadhu—in the first year by Swami Govindagiri. The cottage stood in a solitary garden far from the haunts of common men. The secluded spot was particularly congenial to a life of peaceful meditation and the study of the scriptures. The two cottages originally constructed to accommodate two persons, still remain what they were .....Swamiji who always loved a life of withdrawal from the hurly-burly of life never desired to have it enlarged or rebuilt. At Uttarkasi he leads a quiet life of spirituality undisturbed by external distractions. During the earlier years some educated, devout and well qualified persons like Swami Atmananda and Swami Dhiresananda used to come there to study Vedanta. To discuss Vedanta, with such loving, sweet-natured people so full of humility and to clear their doubts was a pleasure. Of these men Swami Atmananda who was specially devoted to Swamiji was the foremost. Inspired by Swamiji, he wrote and published books like " Chithha Sambodhanam " and continued to stay on at Uttarkasi. Because of his discussions on Vedanta in the company of virtuous people he was particularly dear to Swamiji. There were also learned and elderly sanyasins like Swami Sri Devagiri—Those scholarly men who were finding their joy in the Self, gave Swamiji great pleasure by their spiritual talk.

The elderly people say that in olden days Rishis and Munis who meditated on the Self and were rich in discrimination, dispassion, etc., lived in large numbers in the Himalayan region. But today only rarely such persons interested in the contemplation of Truth and skilled in it and possessing such natural inclinations are found in this region. That is the misfortune of the holy Himalayas or what else is it? Even in states like Kashmir a similar misfortune has overtaken those great educational institutions where different subjects connected with our ancient culture were taught and new ideas were brought into being.

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In worldly existence, rise and fall follow alternately like the motions of the felly of a wheel. There is nothing everlasting. We have to console ourselves with some such thought. In spite of all this, there is room for satisfaction in the thought that there are still some Sanyasins rich in discrimination living at Uttarkasi and other places on the bank of the Ganga and that as a result of contact with them, some natives at least do think of Truth. Once, on his way to Badri, Swamiji had stayed for a day or two at Tehri, the capital of the Province. On that occasion, he had noticed the presence of more people interested in spiritual affairs than elsewhere. He surmised that this must be due to the fact that great mahatmas like Swami Vijnananda and Swami Rama Teertha had lived there for some time and the people of the place had opportunities of coming into contract with them. It is universally known that the love of Satsanga, discrimination, dispassion, bhakti, jnana, etc., are engendered and developed by contact with distinguished saints and proper training and discipline. At Tehri Swamiji visited both where Swami Rama Teertha lived and where he renounced his body. He spent a plesant night in a temple at a neighbouring village called Madguna, enjoying the hospitality of the villagers. At Uttarkasi, not only the natives of the place, but also the sadhus from the plains and pilgrims on their way to Gangotri used to flock to his asram for Satsanga and the study of Vedanta. Some devout people came and stayed there simply to meet good and saintly persons. A large number of common and distinguished people came to the asram to see Swamiji and get his counsel; he had to devote a considerable part of his time to them.

Once, actuated by a desire to visit Dundithal and enjoy the beauty of the lake, Swamiji set out with Swami Atmananda and a few other Sanyasins for that holy spot. Though he had visited the region before, he had not been satiated with the sight of that beautiful place. On reaching the lake, in company as well as alone, he accomplished the thirty mile circumambulation of the lake, which refreshes the mind,, exercises the body and adds to one's merit. Frequently he reached a state of samadhi in which he lost all external conscious-

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ness and his mind became perfectly quiet. At Uttarkasi, owing to congenial time and place, the mind was shorn of all other thoughts and it rose above all distractions into a state, pure, enlightened and free so he became eager to stay on at the place, without going down to Rishikesh even during the cold season. In winter there used to be snowfalls. The whole place would then look like molten silver producing a celestial splendour and causing great happiness to Swamiji. Thus in Winter time Uttarkasi appeared to increase the Satwik spirit and became clean, pure and spotless; it became Swamiji's chief abode. The asrams at Rishikesh and Gangotri therefore, lost their importance. The peaceful residence at Uttarkasi is not only respectable, but also capable of bringing liberation to souls through the grace of Kasi Viswanath. From the very childhood Swamiji's chosen ideal was the Lord of Kailas. Perhaps that was why he was able to go to Him and stay near Him. Kasi is Brahmavidya itself and the residence at Kasi, is therefore, abidance in Brahma Vidya (Knowledge of the Supreme).

Learning that a Swamiji from Kerala was leading a glorious and fruitful life at Uttarkasi, in the Himalayas, the people of distant Kerala also began to praise him. As he had done in his own native place, Swamiji lived here too in a peaceful and secluded spot. He ate only once a day and that only pure, Satwik food. The only difference was; at Uttarkasi it was received as bhiksha from outside. Neither at home nor at Rishikesh did he drink milk. Later, for some reason or other, he began to drink it at night. At first he did not drink tea; at Rishikesh he began to take it. In the northern regions drinking tea is universal. It confers certain benefits. Sometimes it serves as a medicine. Thus Swamiji used to take non-pungent food, milk, fruit, and tea in moderate quantities—There it was always peace, peace, peace. There were no external distractions whatever, because there was nothing there apart from Brahma Vidya. To know the Truth, to follow It, to lead worthy, qualified people along towards It. How can any pleasure arising out of worldly activities compare with the sense of satisfaction and happiness resulting from such activities?

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CHAPTER 10

The early life of Swamiji at Rishikesh has already been dealt with. Now, a brief account may be given of the later life as well. However, no attempt is here made to describe in detail the various incidents that happened in the course of his life year after year. Upto 1937, whenever Swamiji came down to Rishikesh from Uttarkasi, he used to stay at his own hermitage as before. All the while, the number of educated Sanyasins devoted to the idea of God-realization was increasing fast at Rishikesh. Dispassionate householders and Vanaprashtas too were flocking to the place to secure spiritual knowledge. Among them Ram Lal deserves special mention. He was sincerely devoted to Sadhus and was full of humility. From his native Punjab he used to come to Rishikesh every year to study Vedanta and to participate in the Satsangas. Being an eager learner Ram Lal began to study Geetha Bhashya and other books on Vedanta from Swamiji along with Gangasankar and other devotees. Every evening he joined the gathering at Swamiji's hut and took part in the philosophical discussions which were as dear to him as the breath of his nostrils. With a heart full of faith and devotion he participated in them. In proportion to his eager attention, his knowledge of Truth, grew in dimension. Another of the remarkable devotees was Sri Baladeva Prasad from the suburbs of Lakshmanapuram. He was a brahmin naturally rich in the spirit of renunciation, dispassion and tapas. Still he desired ardently to take part in the meetings of good and learned people and thereby increase his knowledge. Accordingly, he also studied certain books on Vedanta suited to his purpose. His association with the good and learned and his Vedantic studies and practice progressed without let or hindrance. On account of long, faithful and devout association, modest behaviour and constant endeavour to realize Truth, both of them endeared themselves to Swamiji. That is why special mention is here made of them. Sri Ram Lal is now a Vanaprastha and Sri Baladeva Prasad a sanyasin with the yogic name "Anandavanom". Devoting themselves entirely to the pursuit of Brahma Vidya both of them remain ever dear to Swamiji.

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Among the visitors who came to see Swamiji at his cottage in Rishikesh were some Westerners. They were eager to master Yoga especially as a means to worldly advancement. Whether it is Yoga, Bhakti or Jnana they will pursue it, if they like, with singular earnestness; but, their objective will always be worldly prosperity; they will hardly think of "other worldly" happiness. That is the difference between the outlooks of the Orientals and of the Occidentals. The wise can easily perceive that it is passion and not dispassion that is at the root of the Westerner's curiosity to learn and practise Yoga. They evinced no great eagerness to understand God-principle or learn about the sadhanas leading to God-realization . Once an American lady came to Swamiji and eagerly requested him to explain the nature of Samadhi:

Swamiji—When there is neither the Presence nor absence of Sankalpa (idea) in the mind, that state is called Samadhi.

Lady.—Would you kindly explain that for me?

Swamiji.—That 'Sankalpa' whose rise makes the mind unsteady, must be checked gradually, step by step. The mind must then be raised higher and higher to a state where all thoughts are checked. That state is called Samadhi. When all activities of the mind cease, what remains, what shines by itself, is the Truth, the Self, the Supreme Self. What is required is to abide constantly in It. It is impossible to explain Samadhi or the Self that is of the nature of Samadhi, so as to make it intelligible to others. A wordy disquisition on the subject avails nothing. Experience alone can enable any person to understand It; mere intelligence cannot. Who can explain the sweetness of honey in words? If you can not enter into a prolonged state of Samadhi, you must be satisfied with a short one. However brief it is, it enables the person to realize the nature of Self. Various Siddhis (Superhuman powers) are obtained through mental control and these are described in several books. But such Siddhis can lead only to worldly prosperity and not to Liberation. The true seekers of Liberation who aim at the highest goal of existence, the unsurpassed, eternal peace, should never care for Siddhis. Their endeavour must be to reach the state of samadhi in which they can realize the Self. Those who

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practise Dhyana and Samadhi should make use of the senses only to enjoy such pure objects as would elevate the mind. The impure objects leading to mental demoralization should be discarded altogether."

This was the substance of the answers Swamiji gave to the questions of the American lady regarding Samadhi. On another occasion, another lady from the West who came to Swamiji at the "Muktasrama" accompanied by two English gentlemen, asked him respectfully, "How can one gain eternal peace of mind without renouncing worldly affairs? Mental peace is my only objective; nothing else. Everyday I read books on Vedanta like the Yogavasishta. What other Sadhanas should I perform? For people who have not renounced the affairs of the world, is it possible to attain mental peace, or is it impossible? etc., etc.," By nature this lady was different from the former one. She had discrimination and dispassion. She had withdrawn her mind from worldly affairs. She had the eagerness and the ability to ponder over the Supreme Truth. Swamiji was very much pleased with the purity of her mind. Indeed he had even without stepping outside his asram, daily experiences to show him how thinking differs from person to person, according to the different degrees of mental purity.

Swamiji never resort to unintelligible arguments or expressions in answering questions. He does not countenance that dishonest practice of evading the issue in philosophical discussions. Nor is he in the habit of quoting profusely either verse or prose from books. He speaks with authority from his own experience and that clearly, though tersely. Like a fowler spreading his snares before birds he does not place before his interrogators passages from texts they cannot understand, only imperfectly understood by the speaker himself. It is his conviction that only truths sustained by authority and borne out by one's own experience ought to be propagated by a teacher. The method he adopts for teaching such truths is neither long nor difficult; it is simple, measured! and brief. Once a scholar from the Punjab, eloquent and learned in the scriptures, stayed two or three days with Swamiji at his hermitage. He used to discuss

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the scriptures in a manner befitting true scholars. One day, when a large number of eager learners as scholars had gathered for Satsanga, he asked Swamiji: "What is the state of mind at the time of Samadhi? Does it remain in its own state? If it does, how can samadhi be Nirvikalpa? If it does not, how does he possess the Knowledge of the past on returning from Samadhi? Is that Knowledge of the nature of recollection or is it of the nature of inference?" The interrogator had great faith in and devotion to Swamiji and so he had put the question evidently with no idea whatever of scoring a triumph; his intention plainly was to get the difficult subject lucidly explained by the great master with all relevant references to the various view points of philosophers. Swamiji heard him with close attention and then answered him clearly and briefly using simple logic supported by experience, without indulging in a discussion of the difficult arguments advanced by various schools of philosophers. The substance of what he then said was this:

"In the state of Samadhi in the eyes of the man with the concentrated mind, the Self, all pervading as the sky, fixed and without a second, shines in its own glory. Then there is no perception of the mind or anything else. As his gross body remains visible to the eyes of others, his mind appears to be inactive as in the state of sleep, having been concentrated in some object. There is no difficulty in guessing that the mind having forsaken its own nature, has become fixed on some other object like the flame which burns steadily in the absence of disturbing wind, because, on the termination of Samadhi, the mind is seen to resume its activity as before. The mind, extremely Satwik, pure and fine becomes one with the object of meditation in the shape of Samskara. When a man wakes up from his Samadhi he becomes conscious "Till now I have been in Samadhi". This knowledge can be only the result of recollection and not of inference. Otherwise, the conception of the Self as indestructible, eternal and of the nature of the Knowledge will be disproved and it will be subject to other errors too".

On yet another occasion a minister of the Raja of Tehri named Sri Bhavani Dutt came to Muktasrama. He was a

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learned man interested in the study of the books of Tantra. At Satsanga, one evening, he put Swamiji a question. "What Sadhana will ensure to man sensuous enjoyment and Liberation simultaneously?" It was clear he was basing his question on a statement in a book on Tantras, "श्री सुन्दरी सेवनतत्पराणां भोगश्च मोक्षश्च करस्थ एव" "Those who worship 'Sri Sundari' have sensuous pleasures sand Liberation at hand '. Immediately Swamiji in his answer showed him how meaningless his question was. "How can a man who longs for sensuous pleasures and is immersed in them, wish for the Supersensuous joy of Liberation and attain it? The two are poles apart and are as different as night and day. How can a man who has completely detached himself from sensuous pleasure under the conviction that these pleasures, however, charming at the beginning, are finally productive of only pain and sorrow and longs for Liberation, desire for the pleasures of the senses? So it is impossible to achieve both these ends by the same Sadhana. It is not possible to establish by direct perception or any other authority that those who steep themselves in worldly pleasures can secure Liberation or that those who aim at Liberation will love to enjoy worldly pleasures. If Kings like Janaka and Sikhidhwaja enjoyed worldly pleasure it was not really worldly pleasure, but the balance of their 'Prarabdha'. If in books of Tantra, it is given that it is possible for the same person to enjoy sensuous pleasure and the bliss of Liberation, it is not realistic; it is only eulogistic. So should we understand such statements".

On still another occasion, a Maharaja of ripe age from Gaya visited Muktasrama. A highly educated man, he came to meet Swamiji at 7 p.m. while Swamiji was sitting alone, perhaps on account of his pride. They talked for long on spiritual subjects. In the course of the conversation he asked this question, "The conservative section of the followers of the Vedas holds that everything that is said to in the Srutis, the Smritis, and the Puranas must be accepted unquestioningly as literal truth; at the same time, whatever is said by the ancient and modern teachers of other religions and philosophers of the West must be rejected as false and illusory; is this view

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correct? Will it lead to our prosperity or to our fall?" Swamiji briefly answered him, "The truth, from wherever it comes, must be accepted and what is false must be rejected. If there is any truth in the views of the teachers of atheism, we must accept that too without grudging. If in our Vedas and other scriptures there is anything false, we must boldly repudiate it and reject it. Truth is truth everywhere and at all times and untruth is untruth. A diamond is a diamond whether it lies in a cup of milk or a heap of rubbish. Truth and untruth never change their character on account of time or place or person. On our side of the globe the sun appears as a bright flame; so it does on the other side of the Earth. It does not appear as a dark body. "The horns of our hare are as beautiful as the tusks of your elephant; His, are not like that", such unreasoning bigotry has prevailed with various religions from ancient times. It is a pity that this still continues causing much bloodshed and many massacres. Learned and thoughtful men should certainly try to uproot and destroy this falsehood.. Swamiji's views, however, failed to satisfy the Maharaja. But as it was getting late he had to leave him. Next morning he returned, bringing with him various delicacies and presents but he had to go back disappointed as Swamiji according to his previously fixed programme, left for Uttarkasi on the previous evening itself. This incident is referred to here only to show that even persons occupying kingly positions do have devotion to the penniless sanyasins.

It is only as samples of the independent, brief, lucid but varied and above all, truthful answers that Swamiji gave to the eager questions of the seekers of God, that some of them have been quoted here. A short summary of the instructions that Swamiji used to give to laymen from day to day, is appended to this volume.

Thus Swamiji spent his days at Rishikesh in umbroken spiritual bliss. After 1937, he left his cottage at Rishikesh and took up his abode at a lovely hermitage called "Muktasrama" where he spent the next three years. Later, he started wintering in his own secluded and peaceful hut at Uttarkasi. As it was not necessary to maintain an asrama at

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Rishikesh all the year round for a couple of months' stay, he ceased to care for it. The asrama had stood on the northern bank of the Chandrabhaga. Not long after Swamiji left it, not only the asrama but even the land it stood on, was washed away in a flood. It looked as though the hallowed earth had gone back to its primeval element, being satisfied that it had fulfilled the purpose of its existence. It seemed as an express act of Divine dispensation.

After the destruction of the cottage, whenever Swamiji wished to pass a few weeks at Rishikesh, it was Sri Gangasanker who made all necessary arrangements for his stay. His devotion to Swamiji knew no bounds. As at Uttarkasi and Gangotri, at Muktasrama also a sanyasin used to stay with him, assisting him. At the grass hut Swamiji had lived all alone. There was no room for another. Moreover, Swamiji preferred a life of solitude. Some young sadhus who resided in the neighbourhood used to come to his cottage daily to learn Vedanta. Not only to become his disciples and serve him but also to receive Sanyasa at his hands, many educated youngmen used to flock to him. To say that there were no persons of discrimination and dispassion among them would be incorrect. But Swamiji was ever opposed to the idea of adding to the number of Sadhus and so he did not initiate anybody into the Order. The number of disciples who made great strides in Brahma Vidya and got well established in faith through study and Satsanga was ever on the increase but he never favoured any of them with formal initiation. It may be confidently asserted that he was not born to lead a life of pleasure surrounded by a vast circle of disciples. Besides, he had never entertained any plan of action requiring the co-operation of any large number. Naturally he needed no help from a multitude of disciples, agents or servants. A recluse, leading a secluded life with a single undivided aim, what work had he to do? Begging for food was his sole activity. But as it has been said before, he used to get plenty of food at Rishikesh without any effort on his part. At Uttarkasi and Gangotri too he received regular supplies at his residence; so nothing was left for him to do. In these circumstances what need had he for any external activity?

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It was while Swamiji was residing in Muktasrama that Kumbha Mela once occurred at Hardwar. Everybody was filled with an eager desire to attend the Mela. With some devotees Swamiji too went to Hardwar and had the ceremonial bath in Brahmakunda on the Sivarathri day itself, previous to the Kumbha snana. Threading through the crowded streets and enjoying a look at the several shops and commercial centres, he proceeded to Kamkhal. There he visited the Daksheswara Mahadeva Temple and returned to Rishikesh the same evening. As he felt there was no great use of jostling in the crowd he gave up the idea of visiting the Mela on the most important day. That year, many men and women who had come to attend Kumbha Mela came to Swamiji's residence to see him. Several of these Sanyasins and householders were from Kerala. "Swamiji be pleased to visit Kerala now and then and bless the people with your darshan and your spiritual counsels. Swamiji affords the people of other provinces the good fortune to see him and hear him. Then, why not he allow the same privileges to the people of his home-district?" asked they repeatedly in all humility. "Everything happens according to God's will. What are we to do, or undo or do otherwise? was Swamiji's reply. A brahmin who had come from near Swamiji's home told him many pieces of news. All that appeared to Swamiji as the particulars of a dream.

Next year, that is in 1940, when Swamiji was residing at Rishikesh, he received a letter from his brother, written in English. It was after seventeen long years that Swamiji received a letter from him. Respectfully he wrote: "It is years and years since we received any information about Swamiji's well being. Till now we have had only the pleasure of listening to some news indirectly transmitted to us. This letter is now written owing to an irrepressible inner urge. We have indeed a deep desire to write to your now and then to learn of your health and happiness. Be pleased to grant us permission to do so". On receiving such a letter from his brother whom Swamiji had almost forgotten through long separation, his heart was moved a little. With love and joy he wrote back thus, "There is no objection in writing to me if you require any spiritual

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counsel. I shall be glad to help you as I help other people who seek my advice. Otherwise, I don't find any use of augmenting worldly activities by correspondence."

In 1942 Swamiji spent two or three months in a solitary cottage near Muktasrama. There was, however, no change in his daily programme. In the years 1944 and 45, it was at a cottage called " Munisaikathan " newly built by Dr. Pannalal, adviser to the Government of Uttar Pradesh, that he lived in comfort. During this stay, Sri Narendra Sah, Maharaja of Tehri—Garhwal, paid him a visit. Subsequently, his son Sri Manavendra Sah, Crown Prince of Tehri, too, visited him at Uttarkasi. Both the Maharaja and his son had great faith in and great respect for Sadhu mahatmas. In making particular mention of their visits, there is some purpose. It was within the beautiful territory of this Maharaja that Swamiji had spent a great part of his life in peace. Besides, it was here that Swamiji attained the status of a Paramahamsa as a result of strict and prolonged ' tapas '. It is in this ancient state that the Ganga, Mother of the three worlds and purifier of the fallen, manifests herself for the first time upon the Earth. The place where the Ganga emerges is unequalled in Divine glory. In beauty it is supermundane and justly far famed. There may be countries and countries superior to this State in material riches but it still remains unapproached and unapproachable in spiritual wealth—being the centre of spiritual effulgence and the abode of great Rishis from immemorial times. People usually extol His Highness as Lord Badrinath because of his dynasty's tradition of unswerving devotion to the Lord of Badrinath. How can the visit of such a noble Prince be altogether omitted? or how can it be dealt with as an ordinary incident? Having freely lived for several years in that Divine country, having had the good fortune to carry on ' tapas ' unhindered and to enjoy the unique material as well as the spiritual beauty of the land, Swamiji feels deeply indebted and supremely pleased and thinks that his life has attained its purpose over there. So it is no wonder if his hearty good wishes go out to the noble country and to her noble ruler. He makes it unequivocally clear. What else need be said?

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While he was staying at "Munisaikatham" he used to explain various books on Vedanta for the benefit of educated disciples like Sri Pannalal, Sri Ganga Sanker and Sri Kasi Prasad (of the last, no mention has been made in these pages hitherto—He was a native of Sitapur—He came to Rishikesh and stayed there to meet Swamiji and to enjoy Satsanga). Except for this diversion, life flowed smoothly according to the daily routine. Some times educated people from Narendranagar, Capital of Tehri, came to Munisaikatha to get a darshan of Swamiji and share in the Satsanga. Among them Sri Pandit Viswambhara Dutt deserves special mention. He was a graduate in the service of the Tehri government. A good scholar in Sanskrit he had secured Swamiji acquaintance even at Uttarkasi. Sri Raghavacharya, who resided near Swamiji's asram, was a scholar and an old acquaintance of his. Every day he attended the Satsanga held at Swamiji's residence and sometimes delivered scholarly discourses on Vedanta which very much delighted the audience. Paying visits to the nearby Sivanandasrama was another source of delight to Swamiji. Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswathi, a longstanding friend of Swamiji and founder of the Sivanandasrama, and his disciples received him with honour and love and sometimes sent him tasty dishes prepared in the southern style. All this Swamiji could never forget. From the time he was staying in the grass hut at Rishikesh, several persons fond of Satsanga, were accustomed to meeting him. Some of them were immensely rich. If only Swamiji had a faint desire to accumulate money he could have done so quite easily. "What is the purpose of money except for the main tenance of one's body?"—Such was ever Swamiji's attitude. So, whenever his disciples humbly offered him gifts of money he rejected them thankfully. He did so out of fear or upon consideration of duty as a Sanyasin. He was by his every nature averse to accepting anything from anyone. So he rejected even what came to him by chance. It was a life of renunciation that suited his mind. Sanyasins often acquire money for worldly purposes like establishing asramas, etc., and busy themselves with such work. As for Swamiji, he was even indifferent to such activities (as has already been said). In the early days of

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his stay at Rishikesh, in time and out of time, Swami Govindagiri used to prod him with liberty and love " Sanyasins from the other parts of Bharat have their havens in Rishikesh; but for the Sanyasins from South India, there is none. Why don't people like you, who have the resources if they will, take pity upon them and do something?" But all these proddings proved to be in vain. Nothing could induce Swamiji to change his own idea. Neither his own will nor other people's instigation could persuade him to launch upon any worldly undertaking. Nor did he ever wish to amass wealth for any such purpose. To secure for his own mind everlasting cheerfulness, peace, tranquillity and happiness and teach others to compass them was his sole aim in life. Everything else and conflict with this aim, he jettisoned clean overboard.

No attempt is here made to add anything more to this autobiography. The story has been brought up to 1948. Some people may doubt in all sincerity whether the narration of the life-story of a common sanyasins who has, neither in the worldly nor in the real sense, anything of the lofty and unique greatness of the sovereigns of Sanyasa like Sri Buddha or Sri Sankara, serves any useful purpose. True; but, is it logical to say that the poor flies and mosquitoes have no right to fly, because the great Garuda, King of birds, does? While mighty Kings dwell in luxurious palaces, do not their humble subjects live in little cottages? If some people fly in aeroplane do not many people plod their weary way along the stolid earth? In the economy of the universe everything has its place, its own use. If the fly can not do the work of Garuda, neither can Garuda do the work of a fly. Similarly a subject cannot discharge the functions of his monarch; nor can be the great monarch perform the duties of a subject. In the light of these obvious facts it is hard to decide whether something is useful or useless, noble or ignoble. Everything is useful, noble and as individuals, unique. Viewed in this way who can doubt that the Sanyasins who are solely devoted to God and the stories of their vision of God are of some significance? " Who are you? Where were you born and brought up; How far have you studied? What are your customs, your ideas, your actions?" When

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people are filled with curiosity to learn such facts, it is no doubt one's duty to satisfy them by providing correct information. That is why it was stated at the beginning of the book, "to satisfy the curiosity of friends and for the pleasure of Self" To satisfy such curiosity in the future as at present, is the chief aim of this composition. The first part of the book ought to satisfy the Northerners and Part II should satisfy the Southerners. Of course, the book does something more than satisfying mere curiosity. As the author has discussed difficult spiritual subjects in the course of his attractive narration of spiritual history, like sugar-coated pills they ought to agree with the consumers and benefit them indirectly and help them to realise the goal of human existence, namely, the realization of God. When people get all the facts relating to a great life that they have learnt to admire and love, there is a natural tendency to imitate the hero or copy his life, at least, in part. Having such four noble objectives, the labour of composition becomes pleasing and praiseworthy. The book is here brought to a close with a great sense of satisfaction of having accomplished a work capable of producing great good. While concluding the book, the author humbly salutes again and again the holy dust from the feet of the Sanyasins who are worshipped even by the gods. But who are those sanyasins the dust from whose foot are worshipped by the gods? Only these—who are entirely devoted to God, who are established in God, who are eager to secure the vision of God, who having found God everywhere and in everything, try to lift up others as well as themselves and thus hallow this world itself with their lives, who answer to the description contained in the Geetha "निर्मानमोहा जितसङ्गदोषा अध्यात्मनित्या विनिवृत्तकामाः द्वन्द्वैर्विमुक्ताः सुखदुःखसंज्ञैः....." (गीता XV, 5)

"Who are untouched by egotism and delusion, who have conquered the evil of attachment (for their sons etc.) who are established in the knowledge of Self, who have freed themselves from desire and from dualities like pleasure and pain etc....." (Geetha XV, 5)

Let such people live where they will, when they will, in whatever society they will, whether according to the convention

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of the age they put on the saffron gown and carry other symbols or not, they are equal to God, and deserve to be universally honoured and worshipped. A man does not become a sanyasin simply because he dons the saffron gown, puts on the holy garland or carries the Kamandalu (water pot). To become a true Sanyasins he must have the necessary mental state, the spirit of true renunciation, dispassion, detachment. Association with the various Orders of Sanyasins helps one to reach the authoritative steadiness of experience. Here a beautiful and well-known stanza comes back to the mind.

आबद्धकृत्रिमसटाजटिलांसभित्ति- ।
रारोपितो मृगपतेः पदवीं यदि श्वा ॥
मत्तेभकुम्भतटपाटनलम्पटस्य ।
नादं करिष्यति कथं हरिणाधिपस्य ॥

" Suppose one ties a lion's mane around the shoulders of a dog and seats him on the throne of the King of beasts, can he roar like the fierce lion that dashes out the brains of a mighty, mad elephant with a single stroke of his paw? "

Before concluding, a brief summary of the spiritual truths that Swamiji taught at Rishikesh and other places, during the Satsangas, is given for the use of the earnest seekers of God.

Teachings

(Here is a Summary of Swamiji's teachings at the Satsangas held daily at Rishikesh or elsewhere)

The ultimate truth is one; there in there is no room for plurality. If there are two things there can be no independence—How can a depedent and limited thing be eternal? The ultimate truth, therefore, is one and without a rival. It is that truth that is variously designated as God (Iswara) and Supreme Self (Paramatma). When it is conditioned by the adjunct of the body it is called Jiva (individual self). Man thinks " I am this

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body",—this body made up of flesh, blood, bone, etc., and becomes sad by the very birth, never finding joy. So long as this identification of the individual self with the body continues it cannot liberate itself from worldly sorrows.

When did this mighty illusion which is at the root of all worldly suffering originate? It is impossible to answer this question. If this self, which is beyond Space and Time, originated at any time, be sure the great illusion too had its, origin at the very same moment. If with the help of scriptures or logic we realise that this soul has no beginning, how can we conceive of a beginning for illusion? Even as the Supreme Self, which is the ultimate Truth, is constant and eternal, the Power which is its form too is real and everlasting. This Universe with all its diversity is but the effect of that basic Power. For them who understand its nature it exists only in the present. So, waste not your precious time trying to answer questions like "When did this illusion originate? from where?" etc., etc. and continue to be immersed in this ocean of worldliness of births and deaths. It is the way to destory this illusion that is sought after by the wise. It is for the cold water that the scorched man seeks.

On the destruction of this illusion, which has no beginning, Jivatma (individual soul) becomes one with Brahman (Supreme Self). This is the goal of human life. This is the state of Nirvana. The five elements and things composed of them in the shape of movables and immovables are in a constant state of change. How can they be, then, permanent and real? Still some say that they are changing, yet real. What is subject to change can never be real; it is nothiug but unreal. Creation is the expansion. of the Divine Power; its contraction is Pralaya (Dissolution). This being so, how can this be different from that Power? Billions of billions of Universes with their movables and immovables once existed; if they were all real where are they gone now? Everything is as ephemeral as a water bubble and temporary. Effect is not distinct from cause, even as pot is not distinct from the clay. If that is so, how can this universe, which is the effect, be real if it is not identical with the Supreme Spirit? Let universe be what it is, what is the use of investigating

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its nature? On the contrary, we ought to think of that Supreme Self which is of the nature of consciousness and joy. That is why it is given in the Vedanta Sutras. It means that man should give up his other thoughts and concentrate his mind upon the meditation of Brahman. Everything unreal and dependent is of the nature of sorrow. For the unwise untruth appears as truth. Even so, worldly life is mistaken to be joyful. True bliss is real and eternal and not inert. So Siva, the Auspicious One alone is of the nature of joy, the giver of joy. So the man who desires happiness should take refuge, not in things unreal and evanescent, but, in the Supreme Self which is the ocean of happiness. As worldly existence is of the nature of sorrow. every one in the world should try his utmost to escape it. Worldly ones should use worldly means to overcome worldly sorrows. Then the path of the spirit will open itself to them. Spiritual life is the sole remedy for the three types of anguish—adhyatmika, adhidaivika and adhibhouthika (anguish arising from one's own body, from the elements and from other beings). It brings Liberation to Corporeal as well as incorporeal beings.

There are different religions in the world. Don't get puzzled, like small children, as to which of them is superior or inferior. All religions of the world aim at a great and divine life. That love of God and Godly qualities is as dear to them as the very breath of life has been declared unequivocally again and again. This being so, how can one be good and the other bad? That which suits one's samskara, birth and intelligence is the best for him. It, therefore, follows that we should respect the other religions which are dearer to others for the same reason. We should follow our religion and practise its sadhanas (steps to Realization) for the good of the Self without giving way to the spirit of bigotry and intolerance. What is essential is to understand correctly the principles of religion and put them into practice with full sincerity. Only in that way can man attain Liberation and Godhood. All those who sincerely worship Him as One with or without attributes, which form or without it, are true devotees of the Supreme Self. Those who follow the Vedas worship Siva, Vishnu, Durga or Parvathi;

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in the same way, people outside the Vedic fold worship some form of God according to their own samskara.

For, those who worship God in whatever form, in His image or by Symbol, gain worldly prosperity or Liberation according to their desire, because, God, who is within us, knows all our thoughts and desires. Even those who perform good deeds without thinking of God are moralists. By the grace of God, they too become His devotees in the end. Hence all quarrels in the name of religion are absurd. What wise persons ought to do to clear up all the misunderstandings of the common people and establish inter-religious friendship, is to teach the concordance of all religions. Notions of superiority and inferiority, importance and insignificance do not arise, once people truly become friends.

The existence of God, is not to be proved by logic or reasoning but is to be accepted by faith resulting from our previous samskaras. The Vedic statement "

" * supports this view. The Divine Principle manifests itself to him who firmly believes in such existence. To him who hugs the idea of the non-existence of God, how can the Principle manifest itself? Even if it manifests itself, how can that be believed? It is therefore incumbent that one should believe in the existence of a Divine power which is the seed of all this visible universe, which protects and destroys it and which is the seat of all the divine faculties of omnipresence etc. In the absence of such faith man becomes helpless and his life is wrecked in the ocean of worldliness, like the rudderless ship, tossed about by the mountain like waves of a tempestuous ocean. Do you believe that this universe, so wonderful and so full of variety, can be maintained solely by the restricted activities of the sun, moon, etc., without an all controlling Lord and Master? The Power of Nature which is said to work this universe is not different from Him, the Supreme Lord. Those who think that the universe works by itself are labouring like fools under a delusion. True, it is not easy to attain the sweet vision of God but on that score, should men, if they are wise,

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* Kathopanishad 6—13

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give up that noble quest and immerse themselves in worldly objects like woman and gold? God is the ocean of mercy, the saviour of His devotees. A vision of Him confers on man imperishable bliss. With that unswerving faith man should devote his mind and direct it solely to that goal. People who work for it patiently will gain that vision in no distant time.

Give up the delusion that this body is the Self. This inert body is no more than matter like grass or earth. Earth is never seen to act by itself. Similarly this body too is incapable of functioning by itself. This is worked by an independent spirit of the nature of Super Consciousness. That is the Self, that is "I"—Remember this ever. If in this body there is a spirit that is different from it, and illumines it, it must be, compared with Time and Space, everlasting, eternal.

It is that Supreme Spirit, true, one without a second and Supreme, that is known as Jivatma when viewed individually and Paramatma when viewed collectively. The power of Maya which has no beginning or end, and which is responsible for the creation, protection and destruction of the universe, is not different from the Existence—Knowledge—Bliss which controls it, even as the burning quality of the fire is not different from the fire. By means of love and Knowledge sages cross this ocean of Maya which it is very difficult to cross on account of the crocodiles of Desire and reach that Supreme auspicious state which is everlasting, ever pure, absolute, unrivalled and beyond births and deaths. They reach that state from which there is no return. In relation to those who have not attained the knowledge of Truth, Maya is ever active. But it has no power to bind down those who have destroyed ignorance with true Knowledge, who find their joy in the Self having realised that 'I am Brahman'. In such cases Maya becomes as unreal as the coir-serpent That Supreme Spirit which is the basis of everything and which pervades everything alone is True. What is this universe? How, when and from where did it originate?—Leave off all such questions and seek that Truth, Know It and remember It. That is what seekers of Liberation ought to do.

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Teachings relating to the means of accomplishment (Sadhanas)

Think of Truth; think of nothing else. Speak the truth and speak nothing else. Be truthful in your action; do nothing untrue. In this way be truthful in thought, word and deed.

Only for purposes of procreation should man indulge in sex. Never indulge in sexual pleasure simply to satisfy the cravings of your mind or body. A sanyasin should not listen to tidings about women. How much more then should he shun the presence of woman?

First observe external cleanliness. Clean your body, clothes, etc. Next you should purify your mind. Internal, mental cleanliness is certainly more important and more meritorious; yet external cleanliness should not be neglected.

Only when you can see all living beings as your own self can you enter sanyasa. This is the religion of religions, according to the sages.

Sanyasins are great but they have to learn certain noble virtues like vigilance (shortness of sleep) and love of the master, etc., from the dog. From the trees they have to learn how to treat friends and enemies with perfect equanimity and also the virtue of patience.

A man must ever have dexterity in the transaction of business, courage, generosity, humility, straightforwardness, kindness, penance, religious study, etc. It is the ardent faith in one's own Self, God, religion Liberation and in the words of the sages that is at the root of all virtues. He who has no faith son strays away from morality.

Mental and physical control, strong dispassion in matters worldly or other worldly, withdrawal into one's own self, samadhi, these are the most important means for the achievement of the vision of God.

Thirst for fame and name, it is said, is the last foible of great men. Even in learned men who have overcome all worldly desires the desire for fame and name perists. The Vedanta says that this is a worldly tendency too difficult for ordinary men to eradicate. Blinded by delusion man fails to

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perceive that these lofty peaks of fame are capped with the snow of frozen tears. Only when a man has scaled the high peak of worldly honour and reached the top, does he realize that he has painfully plodded his way to such giddy heights for no purpose other than finding new sorrows.

Even in a series of lives, a man of falsehood cannot attain the Knowledge of Brahman. He alone is wise who throws away all falsehood and practises straight forwardness.

Envy that cannot put up with the superiority of others, and the calumniation of the good lives of others, men and women—these are such as to force even the Knowers of Self to go astray. So in these matters, one should be always on the alert.

Attachment and aversion are not altogether different. When attachment is frustrated it turns into aversions. If one can give up attachment it is as good as jettisoning all the evil qualities of the mind. So the relinquishing of attachment is the greatest of virtues.

He who hankers after the vision of God without acquiring such Divine qualities is like a painter that tries to paint without a canvas.

Action without the desire for its fruit

Desire is the seed of all fear and sorrow. Therefore the first thing the true seekers of happiness have to do is to conquer desire. Desirelessness is the panacea for fear, sorrow and other ills of life.

One must perform all one's worldly or scriptural duties without any selfish desire; do them as a dedication to God.

Even those who desire to amass worldly wealth or enjoy sensuous pleasures should worship God with faith and devotion. If faith in God and love of Him gradually increase, all their efforts will be crowned with success. Besides they will understand the evils of a sensuous life and abandon the desire for sensuous enjoyment; Steadfastness in faith and abundance of love and devotion will give them the necessary impetus to do all this. The root of samsara is desire. That is why even the sages beyond the Vedic fold counsel man to root out desire.

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It is not right to renounce all action. Action is superior to inaction. Action by itself need not lead to bondage or Liberation. So the renunciation of all action is not beneficial to man. To tread along the path of Liberation man should learn to discharge his duties without aiming at their fruit. He should also learn to keep up mental equilibrium in honour as well as dishonour, gain as well as loss, pleasure as well as pain.

Even birds and animals do not desire to live a life of inaction. Will then man be content to lead a lazy life, simply breathing like the blacksmith's bellows? So worship God who is the Lord of all action, offering Him service in the form of Selfless action for the benefit of the world, without considering whether such actions are high or low, but ever performing them without an eye to their fruit.

He who does nothing destroys himself. So man must overcome inaction which is his enemy lying concealed in his mind and do his work with, if not without, desire. Without wheels how can the cart roll foward?

The Path of Love (Bhakti)

The first and foremost means of God-Realization is Love—love of the Lord all unsurpassed. Even for the dullest it is not incomprehensible, inaccessible or impracticable. To have as much love of God as an ordinary man entertains for his wife and children, that is one's highest duty.

Love purifies the mind and easily leads to mental concentration. When meditation deepens, the mind gets detached from all worldly trammels. It becomes easy for that mind to realize God and gain Divine experience thereby enjoying the highest state of bliss, finally securing full Liberation.

It is in vain to waste one's time, considering which god to worship. Worship Him in any form. It is the sincerity of devotion that matters. Whomsoever you worship with devotion, the result is all the same. It is in the degree of devotion that the all-seeing all-knowing Lord delights. The dull ones are never satisfied with even life-long testing of the superiority and inferiority of the different manifestation of God.

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All those who have worshipped the Lord in any form—as Vishnu, Krishna, Ramchandra, Siva, etc., etc., have attained Liberation. Not only they, even those who belong to other religions, christians, Moslims, etc., too have reached the state of Liberation by worshipping still other manifestations of God. So, it is all meaningless to quarrel arguing " My God alone is true God, all other gods are naught ". Realize that God is present in all beings and that all the gods of all the peoples are one.

" My religion is the best, and noblest; all others religions are false and ignoble "—How much blood has this narrow thought cost mankind! Even ambitious imperialism has not been guilty of so much bloodshed. Only fools will seek to maintain that one religion is eternal and that all others are evanescent or transitory. This reprehensible attitude of mind is the result of wicked Samskaras and it might be discarded altogether by correct thinking.

All religions thrive on faith and devoutness, not on visual verification, etc. So relinquish all thoughts of eternal.

Either all the religions are eternal; otherwise, all are ephemeral. In all religions there is a substratum of truth. Similarly in all religions there are certain things which appear to be false and therefore militate against belief and therfore all religions are transitory. What is the use of thinking on these lives? All religions have been founded to ameliorate man, to raise him higher and still higher. No teacher of religion has ever dreamt of leading man to perdition. So it is better to put an end to all quarrels in the name of religion and at the same time try to follow the truths of religion.

Pleased with man's sincere love and devotion, God lets him comprehend the Divine Principle which is beyond name and form, beyond the perception of word and mind which is self luminous and of the nature of everlasting peace—peace that passeth the understanding.

So worship your chosen Ideal with constant thought, repetition of holy names, and meditation. The best way for man is to serve the Lord with love and devotion as His servant.

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Don't get worried if during meditation your mind seems to wander far from the object of meditation. Don't give way to despair. As the cow, tired of running hither and thither, returns to her shed, your mind will at last come back to the object.

The zenith of love is the conviction that everything in the world, from the highest to the lowest, is a form of the chosen Deity. Love of God is not physical but mental. All these external forms are possible for the atheist as for the actor who performs his part for his wages. Remember this, give up pride and egotism and devoutly immerse yourself in the thought of God. Love without faith and sincerity is naught.

Practice of Yoga

Pranayama is to be practised with the control of the senses. Pranayama without the spirit of dispassion, etc., will not be of service in the achievements of Liberation. It will be only like a boy's exercise. The processes of Kumbhaka and Pooraka practised by the fools who aim only at sensuous enjoyment without caring for God-realization are just like the control of breath practised by fishermen while diving into the sea to catch fish. If one practises pranayama as a means to the realization of God who is within us, it is laudable; otherwise it is all vain. If naturally one's mind is restful and tranquil and Satwik, conducing to Realization that person requires no pranayama. They alone require it whose minds are harassed and fickle. One should not allow oneself to be attracted by the siddhis (wonder-working powers) described in Yoga Sastra. Take them all as hyperbolical eulogy. Those who sincerely desire to realize the Self will not be side tracked by the wish to attain such powers. Those who devote themselves to the acquisition of the extraordinary powers of anima, garima, etc., or the various siddhis are no better than people captivated by the thoughts of gold and woman. Being worldly, both these sets belong to the same category. After all, chains are chains whether made of gold or iron. Those who seek to master the invaluable yoga as a means to worldly prosperity like the men who study

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the science of healing for material ends, do not advert to the consequences of passion and attachment.

When will my Kumdalini wake up? When shall I attain Yogic powers? Leave off such thoughts and expectations and repeat the Pranava sound (Om) and meditate upon it. Only such yogis attain the fruit of Yoga.

Raja Yoga is a great means to the seekers of Liberation. Mental practice is its form. Abandoning all other thoughts and considerations concentrate the mind on the chosen ideal or the Principle of Self.

Love and Knowledge help yoga. Both help to attain mental concentration. A Yogi should, therefore, go forward with the co-operation of bhakti and jnana.

Importance of the practice of Knowledge (Jnana)

The Vedas and the Vedanta say that Self alone is real. Only when a man realizes Its nature fully, he will attain the state of Liberation. The heroic man adopts one of the four paths—Bhakti, Karma, Jnana or Yoga—to reach the Kingdom of Liberty, illuminated by the true Knowledge. Even the devas are trying to realize the immanent Self. Of all the philosophies this last and noblest one (Jnana) alone leads to Liberation.

In different religions different seekers have obtained the vision of God. These religions are in no way contradictory. They are the different steps leading upto the same goal. Those who truly deserve by accumulated merit attain the Supreme Knowledge by their zeal for realization, their unremitting labour, the blessing of God and the association with the enlightened.

"Am I this body? or am I different from this body? How was I plunged into this terrible worldliness?" The seeker of Truth should constantly enquire into these truths.

I am not the body, nor the senses, nor yet the mind. All these are objects seen. The seer is the Self, eternal and unchanging. I am the Auspicious One, witness to all states and duties.

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This body is composed of the elements. It is as inert as the stone. The light of the spirit whether lasting or fleeting, cannot be its quality. So spirit must be different from the body—That constant spirit which in old age still remembers what it learnt in childhood—the unchanging Self that remains safe even when the body is destroyed—even though it is what rules the body—that is " I ". If consciousness is not the property of the elements, it is not destroyed even when the body perishes. I am the uniform spirit that exists untouched by births and deaths. This is the correct view.

So long as man thinks that this body is the doer and the enjoyer, action will have its retribution. Who can therefore, cast away the sins and merits, sorrows and pleasures arising out of such action?

With the help of such logical arguments, study of the scriptures, contacts with the enlightened, teachings of acharyas, etc., one must convince oneself that the self is different from the body, and that it is incorporeal. It is because people fail to understand the Principle of the Supreme Self that shines secretly as well as openly that they suffer the sorrows of samsara.

Man thinks that this body is the Self. He retains the sense of ' I ' and ' mine '. Bearing love, etc., to this body and those related to the body man gets bound. So long as the she-demon Ego roars and rants within this body, how can man find peace?

Samsara is the expansion of this ego. The destruction of the ego is what is called Liberation.

The perfections or the imperfections of the body are no characteristics of the Self. Yet man becomes worldly ascribing them by ignorance to the Self. By folly man mistakes himself to be the doer and the enjoyer, falls from his high estate, and like the lion brought up as a sheep, reaches the nadir of fortune.

Man must realize the Self by listening to scriptural discourse, etc., thinking and profound meditation. Only the Knowledge of Self will destroy ignorance and the samsara that results from it. Who is this Self that presides over the body of all men and women, young and old and illumines it? This Self, perceptible only to the mental function " I ",—where does it abide?—

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Thinking in this way, one must convince himself by himself that the Self is different from the five sheaths investing it.

Only on setting aside this individual Self that is the witness of this visible universe one can gain true knowledge of the Supreme Self. By the similarity of attributes both are the Self, the One, without a second, but because of the limiting adjuncts they appear as different.

By the practice of sadhanas like dispassion and of concentration mind must be purified. If the mind is not pure, the man may hear the Truth expounded a thousand times but the Truth itself will not dawn upon him. Difficult indeed is the attainment of the purity of heart. But once it is gained, Vedanta says, the person immediately secures the Knowledge of Brahman.

So long as worldly evils such as attachment and aversion, which can destroy everything, are smouldering within one's heart, how can he immerse himself in the thought of Brahman or find peace of mind? When the mind is perplexed and distracted by the mighty flow of fancies, how can the subtle thought of Brahman go on, seeing that it can be carried on only in a state of mental concentration?

To destroy the illusion that this body is the Self and to reinforce the Knowledge of Self, one must, with care and attention, carry on exercises of Brahman in the shape of thought and discussion.

Even when the wise sage is dealing with worldly affairs by means of his external senses, his mind will remain free from love and hate, immersing itself in the thought of Self.

The wise and discriminating seeker of Liberation who sincerely tries to attain Brahman, whether he is a sanyasin or householder, Brahmin or Chandala, is entitled to the Knowledge of Brahman.

Cultured women, rich in qualities like dispassion, whether married or unmarried, like Gargi and Maitrayi are entitled to Liberation.

No one, steeped in sensuous pleasures can ever find abidance in Brahman. Can lotus ever grow on rocks or hair on tortoise shells?

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Whether one has already attained Brahman or is only on his way to Realization, he can function in worldly activities as if they are mere sport, with firm faith in the truth of sayings like "ബ്രഹ്മൈവേദം സർവ്വം" and "സർവ്വമാത്മൈവ സാക്ഷാത്".

The learned man who stops the repetition of "ബ്രഹ്മൈവൈതത്സർവ്വം" enjoys sensuous pleasures with those words. The learned man who discountenances the efforts for the realization of Brahman, is more dangerous than the ignorant one.

Knowledge of Brahman is the highest Knowledge and sanyasa is the means to it. The knave who misuses it to compass sensuous pleasures commits the worst of sins.

Dipping in holy waters, giving of gifts and performance severe penance are all ways of destroying sins. They are purifiers. But none of them is equal to the acquisition and practice of True Knowledge.

It is from the ego that the world tree springs up—with Knowledge one should cut off and destroy the might of the ego.

Within this house—this body—the terrible and haughty she-demon, Ego, is dancing fiercely. How can the lord of the house find peace of mind, while every passing moment is an indefinable terror? Only on understanding the pure, true Self, by the pursuit of knowledge can one destroy the illusion of ego that flows on unintermittently; there is no other way.

"I am Brahman,—Brahman which is detached, devoid of qualities, and attributes, free from Samsara, free from desire,—eternal, true, and ever free, I am of the nature of Existence—Knowledge—Bliss." Associating with the good and enlightened one thinks to oneself "I am not the doer, nor yet the experiencer. Nor am I non-doer. I am not a petty creature of merits and sins. I am free. I am Brahman—the Supreme Self. The pairs of opposites or duality cannot touch me." So he destroys the ego, root and branch, and renders the mind clear, cool and free like the Moon.

Hunger and thirst, sleep and fear and sex, etc., are common to man, beasts and birds. What makes men superior to them is knowledge—temporal and spiritual. Among men, it is he whose mind is ever fixed on Brahman that is the best and noblest.

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" In the realization that the individual Self and the Supreme Self are identical, the Vedic words are the instrument; no; mind is the instrument; words cannot lead to direct perception; no, words like " " do produce effect—Never indulge in such worldly quarrels. Instead, concentrate your mind on the Principle of Brahman.

The ancient teachers have described ignorance as without a beginning, as positive and as destructible by knowledge. On these matters don't enter into a debate. What is useful to us is the knowledge of Brahman. Let your endeavour be to secure it.

None of the Sastras which have aimed at the determination of the nature of things have succeeded fully. In the effort to realize the Supreme Truth, it is not the science which can help you most; it is only faith that can stand you in good stead. So wise men should rely on faith to reach the goal.

Don't give up spiritual exercises until you experience peace, the ineffable interminable peace, that characterises Liberation, through external activities. It is not merely putting an end to sorrows; it is not merely experiencing joys; it is the experience of a state of bliss transcending all other experiences.

The ancient view that leaving of desirable and undesirable actions, the seeker of Liberation should perform daily and occasional duties, is not suitable to the conditions of the present age. It therefore behoves people to give up everything and worship Him who lives in every body's heart.

Despicable indeed are the lives of those men, who, even after having obtained this rare and invaluable human life gifted with the precious power of descrimination, waste it revelling like mere brutes governed solely by the senses. In this worthless worldly life, seek for that lordly state. See all living creatures as your own Self and be happy. Devote yourself to that eternal Truth.

Teachings on miscellaneous subjects

The musk deer does not know that it bears the precious musk, because it is a brute. But you are a man, endowed with

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common sense. God is within you. Still you wander here and there in search of Him. Why?

If a person speaks ill of good people he is a mean and despicable creature. But if somebody, hearing those abusive words, tries to pay him back in his own coin, he is still worse.

In the world the wicked ones are created as a touchstone to the good. So accept their blows as if they are flowers and rise morally and spiritually, higher and still higher.

If the provoked person resolves not to do others anything he himself dislikes by word, deed or thought how can love be destroyed or anger engendered?

He is the mahatma who keeps the tongue, the reproductive organ, word, and the mind perfectly under control and patiently withstands all provocation.

He, who entertains no thought of "I" and "mine" which are at the root of samsara, and has no feeling of pleasure and pain issuing from them, and whose mind remains steady and unaffected by gain or loss, is a mahatma.

Let actions be good or bad, let people praise them or revile them, the mahatma retains his balance of mind and without fear of blame or censure continues to perform his duty.

He who believes in God and is devoted to Him, even if he commits sins, will gradually attain devoutness and Liberation. But, for the atheists there is no hope.

Let the worldly man live in Varanasi or on Kailas, at Badri or Gangotri, wherever he be, his mind will be attached and fickle. Monkey will be a monkey wherever he be.

For the man attached to woman or gold, yoga, learning, tapas, intelligence, etc., are absolutely of no use.

The happiness that falls to the share of him who owns nothing, who knows the Self and is rich in dispassion, is beyond the reach of an emperor or King of the Devas or the Lord of Brahmaloka himself.

A sadhu's greatness is to be measured by the perpetuation of his prestige through his worthy disciples, by his own greatness, conquest of desire, control of senses and abidance in the Self resulting from the strict observance of the scriptures.

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He who indulges in evil action, from behind the stalking horse of religion, is worse than the atheist who freely does evil without pretences and excuses.

So long as one's mind is engaged, devil-like, in the pursuit of worldly objects night and day, that person cannot come to entertain even the desire to secure a vision of God. Then, need anything be said about Realization?

Some say word is the means of Realization; others say it is intelligence. Such debate is meaningless. The truth is both will help Realization.

The Sanyasin who finds happiness in Self wastes no thought over the past or the future, does not rejoice over achievement or bemoan failure. He does not forsake his equilibrium of mind even when oppressed by the wicked or flattered by the good.

Don't allow yourself to be carried away by praise or blame from a distance. When you go near and apply any test you will easily find that much is false. So examine everything carefully and then alone believe anything.

"My guru told me this", "The scriptures have said so". On such grounds don't take things on trust. Use your own intelligence and find out for yourself whether something deserves to be accepted or rejected.

Fools give up the loin-cloth and other externals; but do not reject that whose rejections alone really matters.

Even the man who believes that there is a God who is the Father of the Universe, does not try to understand Him. This fact is as strange as the existence of atheism.

If a spark of sexual desire smoulders in a corner of his heart, the man is bound down by woman. That is why all the eight forms of sexual satisfaction are forbidden to sanyasins. They must always be meditating upon Brahman.

Women have been despised while speaking about men; even so, men have to be despised while speaking of women. The truth is, the mutual attraction of man and woman obstructs the spiritual progress of both.

Accept sorrows yourself and rain down happiness on others. That is what ought to be done. That was why Siva

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swallowed poison and bears the Moon on his forehead to impart coolness to others. Similarly good people everywhere bear good qualities on the head and suppress evil at the throat.

"I see a pot and so I know it is there. But I don't see God anywhere, ergo there is no God." This kind of argument is not only erroneous and unacceptable; it is even reprehensible. You who do not see why the pot manifests itself, how can you see Him?

If by wandering as a mendicant one can become a sanyasin, all beggars should be Sanyasins. If by studying the scriptures one can become a sanyasin, by counting the King's money, one must become a millionaire.

All people in the world are not friends to all other people. Some people who pose as friends prove to be no friends at all in the hour of need. But he who sees the Self in all, and has no desires of his own whatsoever, is the friend of all, at all times, and in all circumstances,—in adversity as well as prosperity.

A devil in private, a saint in public; at home a slave of the senses, outside a Yogi; internally a fool, externally a sage—The man who answers to this description is the most despicable of creatures.

The really poor man is not the one who lacks money but he who lacks the joy of the heart. The wise have said that the best wealth is happiness.

To say that by the blessing of the guru, or by the transference of his powers, one can gain Knowledge and devotion is as good as saying that by the guru's blessings we can fill our stomach without eating. (Nothing worth achieving can be achieved without self-effort).

The true devotee is the one who has no desire or activity other than God's. He is of the nature of God Himself.

In the world there is no new teaching. Neither Sri Buddha nor Sri Sankara has taught anything new, because Truth is nothing new. Words of Truth, too, are nothing new. How can a wise man teach anything new?

Repudiate the sinful conduct of the sinner; but honour the sinner like the Supreme Self. One must exert oneself, lovingly for the sinner's reclamation as for his own.

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Only one's own action will lead to one's purification. The service of hired Brahmins cannot lift one up from sin. We cannot become clean if others bathe. Similarly for the purification of the soul everyman has to exert himself.

He is the true Brahmin who is calm and peaceful and has perfect control over mind and body, who is doing tapas and is ever cheerful, who is by nature as clean as the Moon, and who abides perpetually in Brahman. All others deserve to be called Chandalas. A man may have studied the scriptures in all their branches; may wear the sacred thread and carry a load of books; may be proud of his particular family or tribe—He may be all this, but no true Brahmin. Even the worst scoundrel can have all this. The true test of Brahmin is the possession of Satvik qualities.

Don't be idle, leaving all the future to chance or fate. Only he who walks on and on can reach his goal; not the man who halts on the way. The man who wishes to live must be manly. It is this manliness that, in time, is called God or Fate. Fate is not independent. So leave off the habit of leaving everything to fate and secure worldly and other worldly happiness by one's own manliness.

Men flock to sensuous enjoyments as crows flock to pick up crumbs of bread. No one seems eager to achieve the summum bonum of human life. Drunk with the liquor of illusion, how curiously does man behave!

The One that is never born does not produce itself, yet produce the sky, etc.; the motionless One never stirs by itself but sets everything in motion; the indestructible One does not destroy itself but destroys the Earth, etc.—that One is the Ultimate Cause that rules all dharma.

In all this world there is not a blade of grass or a particle of dust which is useless. Everything has its own place in the economy of the Universe. The Creator of this wonderful order must be omniscient. He cannot be inert like a piece of stone.

These fleeting sensuous objects are not by themselves good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable. If the mind is pure and loving, everything becomes agreeable.

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The Vision of God is of all divine experiences the most divine. There is no object, no goal, beyond it in this world. If it is attained, nothing more remains to attain; everything is attained.

In the world, the Divine Principle which is of the essence of all beauty and which illumines all beings, is nearest to children as well as to the childish. It is something that everyone experiences every moment. The wonder of wonders is that man yet recognises it not because of illusion or ignorance. It is like the invaluable treasure that lies hidden under the earth over which man passes and repasses knowing it not.

It is the Vision of God that brings all worldly sorrow to its end, and it is therefore the holiest of the holy experiences. He who has seen God and has thus once and for ever put an end to the sorrows and tribulations of worldly existence is the one who has fulfilled the purpose of human life. Sooner or later all creatures will certainly reach that goal. It may take ages and ages but it is bound to happen. Even as all water ultimately reaches the ocean the individual Self must reach the Supreme Self. It is the final resting place.

Om Santi! Santi! Santi!

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GLOSSARY

Acharya	..	Preceptor, teacher
Adharma	..	Evil
Adhyaropa	..	Superimposition
Adwaita	..	Philosophy of Non-dualism
Adwaitin	..	A votary of non-dualism
Airavatha	..	The four tusked white elephant in Hindu Mythology
Anubhava	..	Experience, Realization
Apat-dharma	..	Duty in dangerous critical condition
Apavada	..	Process of de-superimposition
Apsara	..	Nymph
Arudra	..	Sixth of the twentyseven constallations in Indian Astrology
Asana	..	Bodily posture in Indian Yoga
Asrama	..	Hermitage
Asraya	..	Container, basis
Atman	..	Spirit of man, Self
Avadhuta	..	A naked peripatetic
Bhagavad Gita	..	A scripture of the Hindus, contained in the Mahabharata; It is a collection of the teachings of Sri Krishna to Arjuna
Bhageerathi	..	River Ganga
Bhashya	..	Commentary of the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Gita by Sri Sankara
Bhiksha	..	Alms
Bhakti Apara	..	Lower stage in devotion
Bhaktimarga	..	Way of Devotion
Bhakti, Para	..	Higher stage in devotion
Bhakti, Sadhana	..	Preparatory stage in devotion
Bhakti, Sadhya	..	Ideal stage in devotion
Brahmachārin	..	Celibate
Brahmacharya	..	Celibacy
Brahma	..	God of Creation
Brahman	..	Absolute Reality
Brahmananda	..	Infinite Bliss

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Brahmamuhurta .. The period of one and a half hours just before Sunrise

Brahma Samadhi .. Highest trance in which the individual soul loses itself in the Universal Sprit

Brahma Sutras .. Vedantic Aphorisms by Vyasa—an authoritative work of Uttara Mimamsa

Brahma Vidya .. Science of the Absolute Wisdom of the Absolute

Brahma Vidyopadesa .. Initiation into Brahma Vidya

Chapathy .. A kind of thin wheat bread round in size baked in the fire

Charvaka .. Atheistic Philosophy

Chathurmasya .. Four months of the rainy season approximately from July to October

Chutty .. A small village in the Himalayas

Dakshina .. Presentation to elders and preceptors

Dama .. Control of the sense organs

Dandi Sanyasin .. A type of Brahmin monk, who bears a flag staff in his hand

Darsan .. Vision, sight

Dasanami .. One of the ten branches of Hindu monastic order founded by Sri Sankara

Deeksha .. Initiation

Deva .. A God, male deity

Devendra .. Mythological chief of Gods, who dwell in the eternal region

Devi .. A Goddess

Dharma .. Principle of Righteousness; Religion

Dhyana .. Meditation

Dravida Pradesh .. Deccan

Durga .. A form of the Divine Mother, the power of Brahman

Dwaita .. Duality

Gandharva .. A heavenly being who is a minstrel.

Guru .. Religious Preceptor

Hathayoga .. A form of yoga which deals mainly with the control of breaths and culture of body

Ithihasa .. Hindu epic

Indra .. See Devendra

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Janmashtami Day	..	The holy birth day of Lord Sri Krishna falling in the month of Bhadrapadon. It is the eighth day of dark lunar fortnight (generally in August)
Japa	..	Chanting of holy names or texts
Jeeva	..	Individual soul
Jeevanmukta	..	Liberated while in the body—a knower of Brahman
Jnana	..	Divine knowledge, wisdom
Kali	..	Last of the four Hindu yugas or cycles
Kalikambliwala temple	..	Temple founded by the trust in the name of Kalikambliwala Swami Vishuddhanandaji
Kamadeva	..	Cupid
Kamadenu	..	A legendary cow which bestows whatever its owner wants
Kamandalu	..	A water bowl of the Hindu Monk. It is made out of a kind of palm fruit, like cocoanut
Kamasastra	..	The book on conjugal love
Karma	..	Action; work; result of work
Karma, Nishkama	..	Desireless action
Karma Yoga	..	Way of work leading to God-realization
Karma Yogin	..	One who follows Karma Yoga
Kesari Yogam	..	Auspicious joining of certain planets at a man's birth time
Kemadruma Yogam	..	
Kinnara	..	A celestial being
Kumbhaka	..	Retention of breath
Kumbhamela	..	An assembly of monks held every three years in one of several holy places in India
Mahatma	..	A monk—a great soul
Mahant	..	Pontiff of a monastery
Malayali	..	A citizen of Kerala speaking the Malayalam language
Mayavada	..	Advaita system of Philosophy
Mela		Festival
Mukti		Final liberation of the individual soul
Mutt		Monastery
Navaratri	..	Nine nights of worship of the Divine Mother in the month of Aswin

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Nyaya	..	Indian logical system
Om	..	The primordial sound or Nada Brahma
Panchakshari Mantram	..	The five lettered Divine formula pertaining to Siva
Parabrahman	..	Supreme Reality
Paramahamsa	..	A monk of the highest type—A knower of Brahman
Pinda Dana	..	Offering of oblation to the names
Pooja	..	Ritualistic Worship
Praisha Mantra	..	A divine formula chanted by the monks during their initiation into the monastic life
Pranava sound	..	Om
Pranayama	..	Control of breath
Prasada	..	Food or drink offered to Deity
Puja	..	See 'Pooja'
Purana	..	Books of Hindu Mythology
Rajasik	..	Pertaining to 'rajas', the principle of activity or restlessness
Revati	..	Twenty-seventh constellation in Indian Astrology
Rishi	..	Seer
Sachidananda	..	Existence, knowledge, Bliss Absolute
Sadhana	..	Spiritual discipline
Sadhu	..	Monk
Sahitya Parishat	..	Literary Association
Sakteya	..	Follower of the cult which worships God as Divine mother
Sal	..	A kind of tree
Sama	..	Mental control, Composure
Sambhu	..	A name of Siva
Samsara	..	Worldly life, round of birth and death
Samskara	..	Tendencies inherited from birth.
Sanaka	..	One of the four first created Rishis who are the disciples of Lord Siva
Sankalpa	..	Thought, idea
Sankrama	..	Passage of the sun from one zodiac to another in Indian Astrology
Sanyasa	..	Monastic order, renunciation
Sanyasin	..	One who has embraced 'Sanyasa'
Saraswathi	..	Goddess of learning and music

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Sastra .. Scripture
Satram .. Choultry
Satsanga .. Holy company
Satwik .. Pertaining to Satwa, the principle of balance or wisdom
Siddha .. A perfected soul
Siddhasana .. A kind of bodily pose most suited for meditation
Siddhi .. Occult power
Sivalinga .. An emblem of Lord Siva
Smriti .. The law books, subsidiary to the Vedas, guiding the daily life and conduct of the Hindus
Sraddha .. Faith and sincerity
Sthithaprajna .. A knower of Brahman
Sudra .. The lowest of the four Hindu Castes
Suklapaksha Ekadasi .. The eleventh day of the bright lunar fortnight
Swamiji .. A monk
Tantric .. Pertaining to Tantra which is a system of Hindu Philosophy
Tapas .. Religious austerity
Tathwamasi .. Vedantic formula which means That Thou Art
Thamasik .. Pertaining to Tamas, principle of inertia and darkness
Theertha .. Holy place or river
Titiksha .. Forbearance
Triveni .. The confluence of the holy rivers Ganga, Jumna and Saraswati at Allahabad
Ucchaisravas .. Name of a legendary horse
Upanishad .. The well-known scriptures of the Hindus
Vairaggya .. Dispassion
Vaishaka, Vaishnavite .. Devotee or follower of Lord Vishnu
Varnasrama .. Institution of Hindu Castes and Stages in life
Veda .. Foremost scripture of the Hindus
Vedanta .. One of the six systems of Hindu Philosophy
Vidwatsanyasa .. Embracing the monastic order after self-realisation
Visishtadwaita .. Qualified monism
Vrata .. Religious fasting or vow
Yaksha .. A kind of the celestial being
Yamadharma .. Lord of Death
Yogabhrashta .. One who was a yogi in the previous birth

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